

AFRICAN BELIEFS  
AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

# AFRICAN BELIEFS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY FOR  
AFRICAN STUDENTS, EVANGELISTS  
AND PASTORS

by

EDWIN W. SMITH

*Author of "The Golden Stool,"  
"Aggrey of Africa," etc.*

LONDON

THE UNITED SOCIETY FOR CHRISTIAN LITERATURE  
4 BOUVERIE STREET, E.C.4

*All rights reserved  
First published in 1936  
Reprinted 1937  
Made in Great Britain*

*This book is published in collaboration with the International Missionary Council's Committee on African Literature and the Foreign Missions Committee of the Church of Scotland. It may be translated subject to application to*  
**THE UNITED SOCIETY FOR CHRISTIAN LITERATURE**

# WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	11
INTRODUCTION: GOD'S SCHOOL . . . . .	15

## PART I

### BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

CHAP.			
<b>I. THE GREAT POWER—</b>			
	(1) From the Seen to the Unseen . . . . .	29	
	(2) The Wonder of Things . . . . .	29	
	(3) How the Power is named by Africans . . . . .	30	
<b>II. THE MAKER OF THINGS—</b>			
	(1) There is a Maker . . . . .	31	
	(2) The Making of Man . . . . .	32	
<b>III. IS THE POWER A PERSON?—</b>			
	(1) Questions Men Put . . . . .	34	
	(2) A Person is Different from a Force . . . . .	34	
<b>IV. A PERSON AND A SPIRIT—</b>			
	(1) The Power is a Spirit . . . . .	37	
	(2) The Power is a Person . . . . .	38	
<b>V. OTHER ARGUMENTS—</b>			
	(1) Reasons for Doubt . . . . .	39	
	(2) <i>Modimo</i> and <i>Mulungu</i> . . . . .	39	
	(3) The use of Images . . . . .	40	
<b>VI. TAKING PART FOR ALL—</b>			
	(1) Heaven . . . . .	42	
	(2) The Sun . . . . .	42	
	(3) The Rain . . . . .	43	
	(4) Earth-shock . . . . .	44	
	(5) The End of this Argument . . . . .	44	
<b>VII. ONE GOD OR MORE? (I)—</b>			
	(1) Worship not given to one Spirit only . . . . .	46	
	(2) The Unseen People of the Tribe . . . . .	46	

## WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK

CHAP.	PAGE
<b>VIII. ONE GOD OR MORE? (II)—</b>	
(1) The <i>Orisha</i> . . . . .	48
(2) The <i>Obosom</i> . . . . .	49
(3) The <i>Lubare</i> . . . . .	50
(4) The Argument . . . . .	51
<b>IX. ONE GOD OR MORE? THE EARTH MOTHER—</b>	
(1) What the Jukun People say . . . . .	52
(2) What the Ibo People say . . . . .	52
(3) What the Ibibio People say . . . . .	53
(4) The Argument . . . . .	54
<b>X. WHY AFRICANS GIVE WORSHIP TO A NUMBER OF BEINGS—</b>	
(1) The Argument of these last Chapters . . . . .	54
(2) The Reasons for it . . . . .	54
<b>• XI. THE RELATION OF GOD AND MAN—</b>	
(1) How God and Man became separate . . . . .	56
(2) Some Stories from West Africa . . . . .	56
(3) <i>Nyambe</i> and <i>Kamoru</i> . . . . .	57
(4) <i>Kyumbi</i> and <i>Kirimagi</i> . . . . .	58
(5) <i>Ruwa</i> and a strange Man . . . . .	58
(6) What these Stories make clear . . . . .	59
<b>XII. HAS GOD A HEART?—</b>	
(1) Reasons for Doubt . . . . .	60
(2) The Story of an Old Woman . . . . .	60
(3) God the Controller . . . . .	61
(4) The Cause of Death . . . . .	62
<b>XIII. IS GOD THE LAW-GIVER AND JUDGE?—</b>	
(1) Some more Questions . . . . .	65
(2) Laws made by God . . . . .	65
(3) Oaths and Curses . . . . .	67
(4) In the Future . . . . .	67
<b>XIV. AFRICANS AT PRAYER—</b>	
(1) Belief and Prayer . . . . .	69
(2) The Form of Prayer . . . . .	70
(3) Times for Prayer . . . . .	70
(4) At Special Times . . . . .	71
(5) Some other Special Times . . . . .	72
(6) When People are Ill . . . . .	73
(7) When there is no Rain . . . . .	74

## WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK

CHAP.	PAGE
<b>XV. HOLY PLACES AND PERSONS—</b>	
(1) Holy Places . . . . .	75
(2) Holy Things . . . . .	76
(3) Holy Animals . . . . .	76
(4) Holy Days . . . . .	77
(5) Holy Persons . . . . .	77
<b>LOOKING BACK . . . . .</b>	<b>79</b>

## PART II

### BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

<b>I. INTRODUCTION—</b>	
(1) How Jews are different from Africans . . . . .	83
(2) There is Development of Ideas in the Old Testament . . . . .	84
(3) The Teachers of the Jews . . . . .	84
<b>II. MOSES AND HIS WORK—</b>	
(1) The Revelation of God to Moses . . . . .	86
(2) The <i>Berith</i> between <i>Yahwe</i> and the Jews . . . . .	87
(3) The Place of the <i>Berith</i> in the Life of the Jews . . . . .	88
<b>III. THE BELIEF OF THE JEWS BEFORE MOSES—</b>	
(1) Knowledge of God but not of His Name <i>Yahwe</i> . . . . .	89
(2) The Old Word <i>El</i> . . . . .	89
(3) The Word <i>Elohim</i> . . . . .	90
<b>IV. THE NEW RELATION OF THE JEWS TO GOD—</b>	
(1) What is in a Name? . . . . .	93
(2) The Name <i>Yahwe</i> . . . . .	93
(3) The Jews in the Waste Lands . . . . .	94
(4) The Signs of <i>Yahwe</i> 's 'Face' . . . . .	95
<b>V. THE WORSHIP WHICH THE JEWS GAVE TO YAHWE—</b>	
(1) The Old and the New . . . . .	96
(2) Holy Places; Offerings . . . . .	96
(3) The Priests . . . . .	97
(4) Feasts . . . . .	97
<b>VI. THE JEWS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN—</b>	
(1) What took place in Canaan? . . . . .	99
(2) The Two Nations become United . . . . .	100

## WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK

<b>CHAP.</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>VII. THE OUTCOME OF THE UNITING OF THE JEWS WITH THE CANAANITES—</b>	
(1) Cattle Keepers and Farmers . . . . .	102
(2) The Gods of the Canaanites . . . . .	103
(3) <i>Yahwe</i> and the <i>Baalim</i> . . . . .	104
(4) The Development of Worship: Images . . . . .	106
(5) The Behaviour of the People . . . . .	108
(6) The Argument . . . . .	108
<b>VIII. GOD'S REVELATION THROUGH PROPHETS—</b>	
(1) How far were They like African Prophets? . . . . .	109
(2) The Earliest Prophets of the Jews . . . . .	111
(3) Another Sort of Prophet . . . . .	111
(4) Elijah . . . . .	112
<b>IX. THE REVELATION BECOMES CLEARER—</b>	
(1) The Times in which the Great Prophets were Living . . . . .	114
(2) The Prophet Amos . . . . .	115
(3) The Prophet Hosea . . . . .	117
(4) The Prophet Isaiah . . . . .	119
(5) The Prophet Micah . . . . .	121
<b>X. JEREMIAH—</b>	
(1) The Book of the Law . . . . .	122
(2) The Changes made by King Josiah . . . . .	123
(3) The Prophet Jeremiah . . . . .	124
(4) The New <i>Berith</i> . . . . .	126
<b>XI. REVELATION THROUGH HARD LIVING AND SORROW—</b>	
(1) The Conditions . . . . .	127
(2) The Prophet Ezekiel . . . . .	128
(3) The Servant of <i>Yahwe</i> . . . . .	129
(4) The Fruit of the Seed . . . . .	131
<b>XII. GETTING READY FOR THE GREAT REVELATION—</b>	
(1) The Conditions . . . . .	133
(2) The Knowledge They Had . . . . .	134
(3) Bridging the Space between God and Man . . . . .	134
(4) The Offerings . . . . .	136
<b>XIII. THE SONGS OF A PEOPLE—</b>	
(1) The Song Book . . . . .	139
(2) The Power and Glory of God . . . . .	139

## WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK

<small>CHAP.</small>		<small>PAGE</small>
<b>XIII. THE SONGS OF A PEOPLE—<i>continued</i></b>		
(3) God is Everywhere at All Times . . . . .		140
(4) What is Desired by God . . . . .		141
(5) The Love of God . . . . .		141
(6) The Private Religion of the Jews . . . . .		142
(7) The Question of Pain . . . . .		143
• (8) The Jews and other Nations . . . . .		144
<b>LOOKING BACK</b> . . . . .		145

## PART III

### THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

<b>I. THE COMING OF JESUS—</b>		
(1) He Came as a Man and a Jew . . . . .		149
(2) The Life of Jesus on Earth . . . . .		150
<b>II. WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT GOD—</b>		
(1) Opening Words . . . . .		153
(2) <i>Abba</i> , Father . . . . .		153
(3) God is Spirit . . . . .		154
(4) God is Good . . . . .		155
(5) God is Love . . . . .		156
(6) God is Near and God is Interested . . . . .		156
(7) God is King . . . . .		158
<b>III. GOD, OUR FATHER (I)—</b>		
(1) Father and Child . . . . .		160
(2) A Look into the Past . . . . .		161
(3) The Experience of Jesus . . . . .		162
(4) The Authority of Jesus . . . . .		163
<b>IV. GOD, OUR FATHER (II)—</b>		
(1) From Man to God . . . . .		165
(2) One of Our Lord's Stories . . . . .		165
(3) The Father of All . . . . .		168
<b>V. THE KINGDOM OF GOD—</b>		
(1) Two Views of the Kingdom . . . . .		170
(2) A Kingdom of the Heart . . . . .		171
(3) A Thing of Growth . . . . .		172
(4) The Value of the Kingdom . . . . .		174
(5) The Kingdom without Limit . . . . .		175

## WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK

<small>CHAP.</small>		<small>PAGE</small>
VI. LIVING AS SONS OF GOD (I)—		
(1) Ways and Laws . . . . .		176
(2) What Jesus said . . . . .		178
VII. LIVING AS SONS OF GOD (II)—		
(1) The Law and the Heart . . . . .		179
(2) The Greatest Rule . . . . .		180
(3) Love for God and Man . . . . .		181
(4) Forgiveness of Wrong . . . . .		183
VIII. GOD UNVEILING HIMSELF—		
(1) The Word of God . . . . .		185
(2) Teaching and Living . . . . .		185
(3) A Picture of God . . . . .		186
(4) The Death of Jesus . . . . .		187
(5) How to get a Good Heart . . . . .		189
(6) Death had no Power over Him . . . . .		190
THE END . . . . .		192

## PREFACE

9

I HAVE written this book at the request of the Committee for African Literature.

For a long time I had been convinced that in teaching Christian doctrine to African students, evangelists and pastors, the starting point should be the African's own experience, belief and practice, and that the course should run through the Old Testament into the New. My colleagues on the Committee (I was then a member) shared this view and forthwith asked me to prepare a manual on these lines. I thought that the writer should be one in close touch with Africans and that he should write in an African language. As I am an exile from Africa and as it is a long time since I wrote and spoke in an African vernacular, I felt disqualified for the task, but my objections were, in all kindness, over-ruled. So with some trepidation I set out to write the book.

It is written for Africans and, in intention at least, from the African point of view. It is written for the purpose of being translated into African languages and of supplementing oral teaching in class. This should explain much that would otherwise be perplexing to a critical English reader.

I am aware, however, that in some institutions the students are taught in English and that many evangelists and pastors are able to read an English book.

The style of English in which I have written is that known as Basic English.<sup>1</sup> I have chosen this in the hope, not only of simplifying the work of the translator but also of making easier the reading of the book by Africans themselves.

Those who do me the honour of translating this book into the vernaculars will not, I hope, feel bound to follow the text literally. It is my desire that they freely adapt, curtail or add as their needs dictate. My own missionary experience was gained chiefly among the Ila people of Northern Rhodesia. It is natural

<sup>1</sup> With the addition of about a dozen words to the Basic vocabulary.

## PREFACE

that in a book of this kind I should make extensive use of my knowledge of Ila belief and practice. Some readers may think that I have drawn upon it too freely. In my opinion the Ila are fairly typical of the Bantu. But I have tried to take a wide view, including not the Bantu only but also the Negroes of the west and east. In endeavouring to cover so large a field and to present a composite picture of African theology I have of necessity omitted a great deal of relevant matter; and I am very conscious that through ignorance I may have left out some very vital facts. Translators will be able to make up my deficiencies in this respect. I trust that they will expand chapters in the first part by reference to local beliefs and practices. In their hands the book should assume living interest and value for readers in particular localities.

It will be noticed that I have made use of many African words. These are not drawn from any one language entirely. They are chiefly technical terms which have no exact equivalent in English. The meaning is indicated or can readily be ascertained from the context. I suggest that translators should substitute vernacular synonyms, or if no synonyms exist they should incorporate and explain these terms. For example, the word *muzimu* (the disembodied human spirit to which 'worship' is given) is readily translatable, while *lubare* and *orisha* (the designations of certain demi-gods) may have no equivalents in some languages. Where this is so, I suggest that *lubare* and *orisha* be retained in the text. To a less extent than I could have wished I have availed myself of African proverbs; these may be left as they are, or substitutes may be found.

I have been compelled to introduce many tribal names. Where these are Bantu I have written them without the prefixes, e.g. Zulu (not Ama-zulu), Ila (not Ba-ila). Without going into geographical detail I have given some indication where these tribes live.

Missionaries argue sometimes about the place the Old Testament should take in the African Church. Some would exclude it for the most part. Some would translate it as it stands. Some would give their people extracts from it. I number myself among those who believe that the Old Testament in its entirety is of very great value to Africans if it is taught in such a way as to bring out the historical development

## PREFACE

of the religion. That is the course which I have tried to follow in the second part of this book.

May I say, in conclusion, that this does not pretend to be a complete manual of Christian theology? I have limited myself to the Doctrine of God. This is, in my opinion, the most fundamental of Christian doctrines, and the most vital in teaching Africans. It provides the best approach to Africans through their own beliefs. I have treated it historically because I believe that to be the best way of treating it. Whether I shall go on to write in a similar way (or in quite a different way) about Man, Sin, Salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Church, depends partly upon whether this book proves generally acceptable. In any event, I offer it as an introduction to Christian Theology.

EDWIN W. SMITH.

CHESHAM,  
*September 7, 1935.*



## INTRODUCTION

### GOD'S SCHOOL

#### § 1

YOU go into a school and what do you see? You see boys and girls, some very young, some older. They are broken up into groups. They are not learning all the same things. Those who have been there a long time are reading books, they do arithmetic, their handwriting is beautiful. Those who first come into school are not able to do these things. Like babies they have to go on hands and knees before they make an attempt at running. Young or old they have to make a start with the A.B.C. or the most simple words like *ba*, *ma*. Their development takes place step by step. With increase of knowledge comes the power to do harder things and to do them quickly. If the teacher does not give the young child a hard book for reading it is not because he has no desire for the child to get on; it is simply because the child has no power now to take it in. A mother does not give meat to her month-old baby; she gives it milk. Only when its teeth come will she give it meat, and at first only soft meat. She does not say to the baby the things she says to other women; her talk is baby-talk. No wise teacher makes an attempt at forcing knowledge upon learners. He gives them a little at a time and makes what they have got, and have put to use, the base for more.

That is the way things are done in school to-day. It is not only the white man's way. It is the one way for all people, of every colour.

Long before schools came into Africa, Africans had their way of training the young to take their place in society. There were no books, but the older men and women had much knowledge to give. They saw how necessary it was to give their children training in self-control, good behaviour and respect for authority. The way of teaching was different from that in

## INTRODUCTION

use in our schools to-day, but there was the same purpose and the same rule. Boys and girls were taken forward step by step.

Let us see how some Africans do it.

In the Sudan, when Didinga boys are about eight years old they are taken away from their houses to a place in the mountains where the nights are very cold. There will be possibly some hundreds present, together with a number of older men who are to be their teachers. The boys are used to play. They have taken sticks or long stems of grass for spears and put up good fights against boys of other towns. But now they are given a chance of learning the true art of using a spear, because after a time they will take care of cattle and will have to keep them safe from attack by lions. They are given teaching in the art of war and the dressing of simple wounds. The care of cattle is an important part of the training; so they get knowledge of the best sorts of grass at different times of the year and of where these grasses are, the places where the tsetse fly is, the signs of disease in cattle, and simple medical substances. Certain plants are pointed out to them, with their names and uses. In addition the teachers let them see what is done when they make offerings to the *mizimu*.<sup>1</sup>

After a time the boys go back to their houses and make use of the knowledge they have got. After five years they are taken away again into the mountains. They are now ready for more teaching. The older men put the boys in mind of the things they have knowledge of and give them more teaching about cattle and plants. The ways of animals and where they go in summer and winter; the right leaves and roots from which to get power for themselves when they are out with the spear; and the rules for the distribution of meat—all these things, and more, are part of the teaching given to the boys.

Later on, when the boys are about eighteen years old, their education is taken a step further. They are now able to take in a number of things which would not have been clear to them while they were children. The law of the tribe, and specially the law in connection with women, is made clear to them. When they were young they were given knowledge only of the words of songs and prayers, but the inner sense of the

<sup>1</sup> *Mizimu* is the word used in this book for the spirits of the dead, who are greatly respected by Africans. One spirit is *muzimu*.

## GOD'S SCHOOL

songs and prayers was kept from them. Now the door of wisdom is wide open to them. They are given the reasons of things which were like a shut book to them before. After this the able-bodied young men were formed into an army for ten years. Their business was to make war and to keep the tribe safe from danger. When this time comes to an end there is a last stage of training. They may now get married and are trained what to do in the responsible positions of husbands and fathers. They are to take their places in the controlling body of the tribe and so have to have a very full knowledge of law and the old ways of the tribe. So far as it is possible to make men wise by teaching they are given wisdom by the old men, who now put all the tribe's business into their hands and take their rest.

In this account of Didinga education there is still some grain which I have not taken out, but you will see what my purpose is. It is my design to make you see that Didinga boys, and boys and girls of every sort and nation, do not get all knowledge in one day, or in one year. It comes to them in stages, step by step. *Kula ubone twaanshi*, an Ila father says to his child, 'When you get taller you will see things.' And as it is with things outside, so it is with things of the heart. *Atamanya naku akuziyoza*, the Ganda say, 'He who has not been in trouble has no feeling of pity.' Experience is a great teacher.

To go from birth to death is like going through a house with a number of rooms. You give the first door a push, go in, put it to, and go across to the other door; you now come into a second room, and through other doors you go into a third room, a fourth, a fifth . . . a tenth. In every room there is something new, something more strange than in the last.

Living is like that. At the birth of a child we say he is only water—*menzhi budyo*, say the Ila. When he first goes on hands and knees the Thonga of Portuguese East Africa put the *puri* (a cotton thread) on the child's arm as a sign that he is no longer a *shilo* (a thing) or *khuna* (an incomplete thing) but *nkulu* (a full person). Later a boy comes to be *mufana* and then a man. While he goes from stage to stage we are on the look out for different behaviour. We have hope that he will give up child-ways, but while he is still a boy we are not surprised that he has not the wisdom of a man of full growth. When he comes

## INTRODUCTION

to be a man we are shocked if we see that he has not put away foolish talk and behaviour.

We see, among those who have authority in the tribe, an old man who overcomes us by his words. How beautiful and full of force his language is! Our hearts are greatly moved by him. And that great man was at one time a baby who was able only to say, Da-da-da! Or, we see a great spearman at work; how certain he is when he keeps to every turn and twist of an animal in the great dark wood; how straight and with what strength he sends his spear through the air; how free he is from all fear! And that expert was in past years a little boy playing with a stem of grass with a thorn fixed to its point; that was his first spear. Or we see with pleasure how a woman makes her pots; they are beautifully formed and strong; and she was in the past a little girl playing with earth.

We are not ever able to say what a child will become when his development is complete. He does frequently what seems foolish to us, but he is testing things; he will get experience through what he does wrong in addition to what he does right. He will be trained by his errors. The Akan of Ashanti say: *Abofra se obeso gya mu, ma onso mu, na ehye no a obedan akyene*—‘When a child says he will take fire in his hand, let him take it, because when he is burned by it he will quickly put it from him.’

From all this we see a very important thing: education is not only learning new things and new ways; education is putting away things we no longer have use for. So St. Paul says: ‘When I was a child my talk was that of a child, my feelings were those of a child, my thoughts were those of a child; now that I am become a man I have put off the ways of a child.’

Baby things are not foolish when they are in the hands of children. We frequently have a good laugh when we see children playing; but it is a happy laugh. When they are playing children have no idea that their play is part of their education; it is enough for them that it gives them pleasure. But we are able to see, on looking back, that these amusements are a training for the time when the children will be men and women. There are, for example, the cows which boys make out of earth, and there are the images of babies which girls make. Let us give thought to those playthings. A little girl gets a bit of wood or other material and puts clothing and

## GOD'S SCHOOL

ornaments upon it; she takes it about in the *ntehe*<sup>1</sup> on her back. She does with it what she sees her mother do with a baby. If you are wise you do not make sport of her. Feelings are coming to birth in the girl's heart which will go on living and working in her long after the plaything has been put away. She is not clear about what is in her heart; she is conscious only of a desire to take care of her 'child.' One day she will have a baby of flesh and blood; and that baby is the reason of the plaything. The plaything is a pointer, a sign; it gives knowledge of what is in the heart and mind of the girl. And more than that: it gives an outlet for the mother-feeling of the girl which is in process of development. Before the birth of her baby she puts away the plaything; she has no more use for it. The thing itself is of more value than the sign; the substance is better than the image.

### § 2

All these things, and a great number more, are true of ourselves and of our children. They give us help when our thought is turning to God and we have a desire to be clear about His ways of doing things

We may see in our mind all the people on this earth as God's school. The learners here are nations, not simply persons; that is to say, not John and Shimani but English, Suto, Ganda, Hausa, and others. Now, as in man's school so in God's school, learners do not get their knowledge by a sudden jump. Nations do not come into being straight away in a high stage of development; like children they get greater step by step. The greatest nations were at one time small and feeble. We see them to-day at different stages; they are like divisions in school, some are more forward than others. Not one has so far got all the knowledge and good sense which are possible to men. The farthest in development has still far to go. God, the great teacher, is guiding them on step by step. He does not give up hope about any of His learners. They frequently go wrong through being without knowledge, or through not having a desire to take the right road. But God has great power of waiting and His children, like ours, sometimes get knowledge of what to do, and of what not to do, by experience of the

<sup>1</sup> The *ntehe* is the skin in which the child is taken about on its mother's back.

## INTRODUCTION

fruits of wrong-doing. The most important things for men to get in God's school are, first, a clear knowledge of who God is and what His purpose is; and secondly, a true desire to do His will. God does His best to give us light and to be our guide, and if our hearts are open and ready He will take us forward.

Now the history of the nations is the story of their education in God's school. The questions we put about them are such as these: How has God been guiding and training them? Did they give Him the answer desired by Him, or did they go against Him? Was their way of living in harmony with their knowledge of God? The road by which the nations have been guided is a rough one. It has gone through trouble and pain. A number of nations which at one time were strong and great have gone from view. But through it all God's hand has been at work and men have come nearer to a clear knowledge of Him and to better ways of living.

### § 3

Now let our thoughts go back to the far-off times when the Christians were a small people and were looked down upon by all others.

In one of the great towns there was a little society of Christians. Their fathers were Jews. They themselves were changed through the teaching of men who had seen and given ear to the Lord Jesus. They had a 'taste of the good word of God.' They came to be straightforward and serious Christians. They made clear their love to God by doing good to their brothers and sisters in Christ. It was hard to be true to Christ in those days. Numbers of people kept hate in their hearts for that name and were cruel to those who had it. They took the goods of the Christians by force; they put some in prison, and they put some to death. But these Christians 'took with joy the destruction of their property and had pity for those who were in chains.' Though they were caused such pain, for a long time these Christians kept their faith in their Lord.

It frequently comes about that Christians become feeble in spirit. At first the fire of their faith has a bright strong flame, and then it gets low till there is nothing but dead dust. It was so with these persons. Day by day while they went about the town the Jews made sport of them. They said: 'You have given

## GOD'S SCHOOL

up the religion of your fathers; what have you got in exchange? Our religion goes back before the memory of man; our fathers were Abraham and Moses; for hundreds of years we have given worship to God in the way they said is the right way. Your religion is a thing of yesterday. We have the Book; what writings have you like it? Away there in Jerusalem is our great Church, the House of God. We have our priests who make offerings at the altar which put us right with God. Ours is the Law which was given by God to Moses. What have you? You have no Church, no altar, no priests, no Law. You are a small, poor, feeble people, you who have meetings in holes in the earth and among the cooking-pots!'

So day by day the Jews went about laughing at the Christians. A water-pot which is taken frequently to the river gets broken at last. There is an Ila saying: *Luvwawa ndu lumana midimo*—'Keep on doing a thing and it will be done.' And some of these Christians, after a long time, put the question to themselves: 'Are not these sayings true? We have given up much; what have we got in exchange?' So doubts came into their hearts. Doubts make men feeble. They were no longer strong in their belief. They were looking back.

One of the chief men of the Christians sent them a letter. We give it the name: The Epistle to the Hebrews. His purpose in writing it was to put an end to their doubts. His word was: Keep a tight grip!

And what was the reason why they were to keep their grip upon their belief? It was because, the writer said, the new is better than the old. 'The Jews make sport of you because you no longer go their ways. Let them go on laughing! What you have is of greater value than what they have. The old was a thing for children; the new is a thing for men. The old was the outer skin; the new is the nut itself. The old was a picture; the new is the true thing itself. The old was an image of what was coming; the new is the substance. The old was for a time; it did its work in harmony with God's design and then its place was taken by the new. Like a shade over water—such is the old; but the new is for ever, it will never come to an end.'

You will be reading this great Epistle for yourselves. Let us take a short look at some things which are in it.

The key to all its teaching is in the opening words: 'God's

## INTRODUCTION

voice, having in old times come to the fathers in the prophets in different degrees and in different ways, has at the end of these days come fully to us in a Son' (Heb. i. 1).

God's voice comes to men. It came to the fathers. It comes to us. If we have any knowledge of God it is because—and in the measure which—He has made Himself clear to us. God has a desire to say to men everything which is in His heart. That has ever been His desire. But because men are what they are, God was not able to say everything to them straight away. You are not able to put all the water of a river into a water-pot. You are not able to make a little child have knowledge of all the laws of the tribe. As I have said before, a wise teacher goes forward step by step in his teaching—step by step with the increasing power of his learners. God had to give knowledge of Himself bit by bit; not because He was without desire or without power; but simply because men were not able to take in straight away what He had to give. Sometimes the word came in sleep; sometimes it came as a law, as a way of doing things, or as a song; sometimes it came as a sign which the prophets made clear. God's voice came through the mouths of His servants—Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah and others; and all of them said as much of God's words as the ears of their heart were able to keep. The word came in parts, not complete. The prophets gave out as much as they were able; but sometimes what came to their ears they were not able to put into words, because they were not clear about the sense. Not one of them, not all of them together, were able to say everything God has a desire to say to His children.

When a great chief has to send a word of peace or of war to another chief he will not give it to a boy. The boy would take in the word by the ears of his head, but not by the ears of his heart; he is not able to see clearly the sense of the word to be sent. The chief may send a number of boys, in the hope that one will keep in mind what another has no memory of. Every boy may keep in mind a word or two and may say it without error, but even if all their words are put together they may still not give completely what the chief said. If a chief sends important news he gives it to a wise and responsible person.

God is all-wise; His wisdom is outside the widest range of

## GOD'S SCHOOL

man's thought. The distance between His wisdom and the foolish minds of His servants is far greater than the distance between a chief and his boys. But the word of God has to come to men through men; it has to be said in the language of men; it has to be said by men who are feeble; and it is not possible for any one man, or for all men put together, to say everything God has to say to us. We see, then, how true the Epistle is: God's voice came in old times to the fathers in the prophets in different degrees and in different ways; it came bit by bit; not ever completely. Not even Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah were able to say God's last word to man.

And then—the writer of the Epistle goes on—‘at the end of these days God's voice came fully in a Son.’ That Son was equal with God. The writer says that as light comes from the sun to be the light of men's eyes, so the Son comes from God; He is the bright light of God's glory. As a potter may take a bit of twisted grass and with it make a print on the wet earth of her pot, so that the design we see now on the pot has the form of the twisted grass, so the Son is the very image, or copy, or picture, of God's substance. Who then is more able than the Son to say the complete word of God to man?

The name of the Son when He was among men is Jesus. He came to the earth in the form of a man. His way of living was as the living of men; and in Him God made clear everything which is in His heart. God said what He had to say through Him; by His lips, but not by His lips only; every smile, every weeping, every act of Jesus is a word of God to men. And God let men into His deepest secret in the death of Jesus on the Cross. All the knowledge we have of God's heart, all the knowledge we have need for, comes to us through Jesus. ‘No man has ever seen God at any time; but God has been unveiled by the only Son who is upon the Father's breast’ (John i. 18).

This, then, is the great word which came to the Christians from the writer of this Epistle. He says in effect: ‘Keep a tight grip upon your belief. If the Jews say cruel things about you, give no attention to them! They say you have no Church, no priests, no altar, no Law. Let them say! You have Jesus, the Son of God, and with Him you have all things. As a child takes a step forward in school and puts away simple teachings

## INTRODUCTION

to take on the harder, so you have put away the small for the greater. As a girl puts away playthings for her baby, so you have put away pictures for what is true. Let there be no looking back! Eyes forward! Put your faith in the guiding hand of God. If He takes away the earlier, incomplete things, it is for the purpose of putting something better and stronger in their place (Heb. x. 9).

And here let us keep in mind that when the Lord Jesus was on earth He said: 'Do not have the idea that I came for the destruction of the law or the prophets; I came not for their destruction but to give full effect to them' (Matt. v. 17).<sup>1</sup> These words let us see what His opinion was about the past experience of His nation. He did not come to put an end to what the Law said or to the teaching of the great prophets. When He said: 'I came not for destruction,' He said that the old teaching had value. When He said: 'I come to give full effect,' He said the old teaching was not complete. The sense of the words is that Jesus came to make the work of the Law and of the prophets complete; to do by other ways what they had undertaken to do but had not been able to do. By the Law and the prophets God, and the best way of living, had been made clear in part; Jesus came to take that work forward to the last stage and in this way to *timiliza* their purpose. Up to then the best light for men had been in them. He did not come to put an end to that light or to say that it was all a false light; He came to make the glory of God's light complete. Long before the sun comes up there is a light, a little light, in the sky; *bwacha*, we say: 'it is getting bright.' The coming of the sun makes the earlier light complete.

The complete light which is Jesus Christ lets us see in what measure the earlier light was a true light and how far it was from being complete. A person is not one person when he is a child and another person when he is old; men are children made complete. The condition of being a child is good and for children it is the best thing; but the condition of being a man or a woman, which takes its place, is a better thing. That which is good is made better by being taken up into that which makes it complete.

<sup>1</sup> In Swahili it is: *Maidhani kwamba nalikuja kuitangua terati au manabii; la, sikuja kutangua, illa kutimiliza.*

## § 4

The effect of what I have said so far is this. Because the Lord Jesus is the complete word of God to men He is the measure of all value. Whatever on earth is not in harmony with His mind is false. He is the judge of our acts, our thoughts, our beliefs. We have to put everything to this test: is it in agreement with His view of God and man, with His view of the right relations between God and man, between man and man?

The Bible itself is to be put to that test, like every other thing. We say truly that this greatest of books is a word of God to men. But the Lord Jesus is *the* Word of God. And if there is anything in the Bible which is not in agreement with the mind of Jesus then we have to put it on one side.

The Bible is not one book; it is a number of books in one. It was not all put in writing at one time. It took hundreds of years to make it complete. In it we have the story of the Jews—and that is a story of development, not of sudden growth. The great thing in it is the way by which the Jews came step by step to a clearer knowledge of God and of His desires, till at last the full revelation was given in Jesus Christ. They were learners in God's school, and in all their experience God was their guide. Like children they were not able to get a grip of everything at first; they went forward by stages. They made a number of errors. Their thoughts of God and of His desires were frequently wrong. In our reading of the Old Testament we see things which are not in harmony with the mind of the Lord Jesus. Then it is necessary not to make an error ourselves but to say: This is what men said and did when the nation was a child; we have come to clearer knowledge now of God's purpose. At the same time we see in our reading that the Jews had much true knowledge even in the earliest days; and then we give praise to God who has at all times given men some light by which to go forward.

Our thoughts about our African fathers will be like those about the Jews. It does not seem possible that God, the Father of all, gave His light to one nation and let all others be kept completely in the dark. When we give ear to their words and see what they did we are conscious that the Africans had true knowledge about a number of things. Their journey was not

## INTRODUCTION

all in the dark. If we see that some things which they did and said were not in harmony with the mind of Jesus, then we will take the way of Jesus and not the way of our fathers. But not for a minute will we be without respect for them. They, like all other men, were learners in God's school. We may put their beliefs and acts to the test, saying: What is the opinion of the Lord Jesus about this and that? And when we come upon things which are good and true we will give praise to God from whom all the good and the true and the beautiful comes.

It is the purpose of this book to make clear the teaching of Jesus Christ. But we will take a road which is roundabout. We will make a start with the ideas of our African fathers, then go on to the ideas of the Jews, and so come at last to the ideas of the Lord Jesus.

PART I

BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS



# CHAPTER I

## THE GREAT POWER

### (1) *From the Seen to the Unseen*

IN his letter to the Christians of Rome, St. Paul said: 'From the time all existence came into being, the unseen things of God, even His power which is without end and His God-quality, are to be seen clearly, because they are seen through the things which are made.'<sup>1</sup> This is to be said of all nations: not only of the Jews and Romans but of Africans in addition. The sun gives light to all men; upon all men the rain comes down. The thunder comes to the ears of all men and they see the bright light which comes with it. Everybody is conscious of things which are not clear to the reason. We all have experiences of which the cause is uncertain. We are moved to feelings of wonder in face of such things as these. We become conscious of a Great Power working in sky and earth and in the life of men.

### (2) *The Wonder of Things*

The writer of this book was having a talk one day in his house with an old African chief who was not a Christian. Upon the floor was stretched a very beautiful leopard skin. The chief's eyes were fixed upon it while the talk went on, and he kept touching the bright marks with his fingers. Then he said warmly: 'How beautiful it is! Who but Leza is able to make such a beautiful, such a surprising thing?' Then with his arms stretched out widely he gave a cry: 'And all these things...! Leza only!' And there was deep feeling in his voice when he said it.

The wonder of things gives men the sense of a Power which is everywhere and has no limit. Their belief is not the outcome of reasoning only. It is true that men say: 'Things have come

<sup>1</sup> Romans i. 20. The Swahili has it: 'Kwa sababu yasiyoonekana yake tangu kuumbwa ulimwengu yameonekana kwa akili katika viumbe, kama uwenza wake wa milele na uungu usioonekana.'

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

into being. It is not possible that they made themselves. It is certain that they have a maker.' But there is more in it than an argument like this. Before men come to reasoning they have a feeling; and long before they are able to see the cause of things and events they have this feeling that there is round about them, and in them, more than what comes to their ears. Something or Somebody is there, 'moving and working.'

This is true of the Africans as it is true of other peoples.

### (3) *How the Power is named by Africans*

The Africans are not all of the same sort. There are over a thousand groups of them and their ways of living are different. Some of them have gone far in front of others in knowledge. Some of them have been in touch with, or have gone among, peoples of higher development than themselves and so have had the chance of learning more than others. Some, it may be, have greater powers than others of reasoning and picturing things in their minds. The conditions in which they are living are not the same everywhere; and people who have round them great dark woodlands or high mountains where there is much rain, may have very different thoughts about things from those of people living in wide open spaces where rain is not frequent and food is hard to get. We will not come across complete agreement among Africans as to what the great Power is.

They give the Power a number of names and from these names we are able to see how different their thoughts are in certain ways and how like they are in others. Some tribes say *Nyambe*, others *Leza*, others *Mulungu*. It is possible to put down over a hundred such names as these. Everywhere in Africa we may come across them. Even the little men who go about in the dark woodlands of the Congo have some knowledge of the great Power. They say:

*Kmvum ko, Kmvum ta, Kmvum gwa!*  
*Me twe, Ke bwe, Kmvum tla.*  
*Kmvum kwa!*

'Kmvum is, Kmvum was, Kmvum will be!  
Spirits up there, men down here, Kmvum all by himself.  
Kmvum the High One!'

## CHAPTER II

### THE MAKER OF THINGS

#### (1) *There is a Maker*

IT is possible to come upon Africans here and there who are of the opinion that all things have been in existence all the time and were not made by any one outside themselves; and it is true that some say that things came into existence by a power inside them. But most of the Africans are in agreement that there is a Maker.

The word *bumba* which is widely used of a woman forming a pot with her hands, is used equally of the operation of making the earth and everything there is. *Leza wabumba*—‘Leza made,’ the Ila say. So they give him the name *Lubumba*—‘The Maker.’ They say in addition that he is *Shakapanga*—‘the One who makes by putting together.’ The Kamba of Kenya give him the name *Mwatwangi*—‘He who has made by cutting,’ the word *twanga* being used of a man who takes wood and makes it into a seat by cutting with an instrument. Names like these are given by other tribes. Whatever the word may be—*bumba*, *panga* or *twanga*—it gives the sense of making a new thing out of something which was in existence before; possibly the Africans do not let their thoughts go far enough back to be troubled about how the first things were made out of nothing.

There is an insect which people of the Congo say is *mfingi a Nzambi ankitula*—‘God’s wasp which takes a thing and makes a change in its form.’ This insect has such a pin-like middle that it seems impossible for the insect to give birth to young or put out eggs. But it is able to do so. It makes a house of sticky, wet earth, formed of four or five small hollow rooms, and puts an egg into every room, together with flies, worms and young insects, first putting these to sleep with its poison-bite. Then it makes the house almost air-tight by shutting it up with earth. When the young wasps come out of the eggs they take the other insects for food, and after a time make their way out into the

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

open air. When people see coming out from the house of earth, not a fly or other insect such as they saw put into it, but a wasp like the one they saw making the house and putting in those things, they get the idea that the wasp has made an insect like itself—out of a worm has made a living animal with wings. That is doing on a small scale what *Nzambi* does on a great scale. And so the insect gets its name—*mfungi a Nzambi ankitula*.

### (2) *The Making of Man*

The Africans seem to take a greater interest in the making of men than in the making of things. The Suto say that the first men came out of a hole in a place named *Intsuanatsatsi* (the East). The Zulu have no knowledge where it is, but say that all nations came up out of the hole. Black men, they say, came out with only a small number of cattle and a little grain, some spears and fire.

Other Africans have a clearer idea of the connection between the Highest Being and man. The Kamba say that the first man and woman were sent down from the clouds by *Mulungu*, together with a cow, a goat and a sheep. The idea of the Fioti is that men were formed by *Nzambi* out of earth mixed with the blood of animals.

The Shilluk, whose country is on the Nile, say that *Juok* came across some clean white earth in the land of the Whites and out of it made white men. Then he came to Egypt and of the wet Nile earth he made brown men. Last of all, in the land of Shilluk, he took black earth and made black men of it. This is the way *Juok* did it. Taking a mass of earth, he said: 'I will make man, and so that he may have the power of walking and running, I will give him two long legs, like a water-bird.' So he did. Then the thought came to *Juok*: 'The man will have to go planting fields of grain, so I will give him two arms, one for gripping the hoe and one for pulling up the grass.' So *Juok* gave man two arms. Then *Juok* said to himself: 'The man will have to see his grain, so I will give him two eyes.' He did so. Then the thought came to him: 'The man will have need to put his grain into his stomach, so I will give him a mouth.' So *Juok* gave him a mouth. After that, the thought came to him: 'Talk and song are necessary to man, and for

## THE MAKER OF THINGS

these purposes he will have need for a tongue.' So *Juok* gave him a tongue. Last of all, *Juok* said to himself: 'The man will have need for two ears so that he may take pleasure in the sound of the dance and music and the talk of great men.' So two ears *Juok* gave him and sent him out a complete man.

Some Africans say, in addition, that a man's qualities—his humour, his tendencies, his complete make-up, the things of the heart in which one man is different from another—all are given to him by the Highest Being. This is a saying of the Congo people: *Ntonda zole kavang'o Nzambi, ntondele wo, ntondele kizolele wo ko*—'God made two loves: I have a love for it and I have a desire for it; I have a love for it and have no desire for it.' That strange thing, the heart of man, God made it.

## CHAPTER III

# IS THE POWER A PERSON?

### (1) *Questions Men Put*

LIKE men of other nations, Africans have put a number of questions about this Power which is at work in all things.

Is it right to say 'he', or 'it', when we make statements about the Power? In other words, is the Power a Person or a Force? Has the Power the form of a man and the heart of a man? Or is it without feelings; something strong, but blind and without hearing, and having no purpose? Is the Power one or more than one? Is the Power the same as the Sun or Rain, or is the Power separate from the things which are made? If the Power is a Person, where is his living-place, far or near? Does he take any interest in men: does he give ear to their prayers? Does he have rule over men, making laws for them and sending punishment when these are broken? Is it possible for him to be pleased by our acts, or to be made angry? Does he keep all authority in his hands, or does he put some of it, or all of it, into the hands of other spirit-beings under himself? Is he good, is he kind? Does the bad come from him in addition to the good—pain, disease, evil, death?

These are very great questions. We will see what answers Africans give, and we will keep in mind all the time that if there is anything true in the answers it comes from God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### (2) *A Person is Different from a Force*

Let us make clear to ourselves the first of these questions: is the Power a Person or a Force?

Africans do not make use of those words, but they may give us help in doing our best to get the ideas clear.

White men have made the discovery of what is named 'energy,' a working-power in things. There is, they say,

## IS THE POWER A PERSON?

energy everywhere. Sometimes it is locked up, as in coal; sometimes it is made free and put to use, as when coal is lighted and the heat is used for driving an engine. Electric power is one form of energy. Nobody has ever seen it. We have no clear knowledge of what it may be in itself. But it is used and we are able to see the effects of it. We are able to send it through wires. Telegrams, the telephone, radio and a number of other things are made possible by its use.

Africans have a belief in a force of a very different sort. It is never seen, but its effects, they say, are very great. It is that something which is working in medical substances (*musamo*, *dawa*, *munkwala*, *muti*) and through all the things to which the Ashanti people give the name *suman*—other Africans say *impindo*, *shinda*, *insambwe*. By some tribes the unseen power in these things is named *ubwanga*. Some men are able to put it to use, for good or for evil; but nobody would say that *ubwanga* is *muntu*.<sup>1</sup> *Ubwanga* itself has no mind, no heart; it is not able to say words, to have a purpose. Men may send it out to do their desires, good or bad; but the quality of being good or bad is in the sender, not in the thing sent. A *mulozhi* may send it for destruction; a *munganga* may give it for help. But *muntu* has desires, purposes, thoughts; he is self-conscious, has knowledge of what he is doing. *Ubwanga* is quite different. This is the sense of the statement that man is a person, while *ubwanga* or any other force is not a person.

This idea is not strange to Africans, though they may not have such a word as *person* in their languages.

In a great number of their languages the words which are names are put into different groups; there are chi- shi- words like *chintu*, *shintu*—‘thing, things’; bu- words like *buntu*—‘the quality of a man’; ku- words like *kuntu*—‘a place’; mu- ba- words like *muntu*, *bantu*—‘person, persons’; and mu- mi- words like *musamo*, *misamo*—‘medical substance, substances.’ People do not make errors in using such words. Generally the words for persons are mu- ba- words. If in this group there are, in addition, animal words, e.g. *muzune*, *bazune*—‘bird, birds,’ *muzovu*, *bazovu*—‘elephant, elephants,’ it is because some people have the idea that these animals have qualities like men: in

<sup>1</sup> *Muntu* is a living person; *mulozhi* is a man or woman who in the opinion of others is a ‘witch’; *munganga* is a medical man.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

other words, their idea of person-quality is not clear. Other Africans put such names in another group. No man with good sense would get such words as *muntu*, *buntu*, *chintu*, *kuntu*, mixed in his mind; he may not be able to make it clear in words why they are different, but in using them he will make no error. He has knowledge of what *muntu* is and is quite certain that *muntu* is not the same as *buntu*, *chintu*, *kuntu*. The Suto will say to a boy: *u se ke ua ba ntho, u be motho*—‘do not be a thing, be a person.’

Let us put it in another way. When the Ila are not certain of the name of a person, or if they may not for some reason say a person’s name, they say *nini*—‘so-and-so’; *mwana anini*—‘the child of so-and-so.’ If it is a thing they say *chinini*—‘such-and-such.’ Everybody is able to see that the sense of the two words is different. In using *nini* we have a person in mind; in using *chinini* we have a thing in mind.

Now we put the question: in the belief of Africans is the Power working in the sky and on earth of such a sort that the name is to be put in the group with *muntu*, or in one of the other groups with *buntu*, *chintu*, or *kuntu*? If they are not certain of the name will they say *nini* or *chinini*—somebody or something?

Is the Power self-conscious, having knowledge of itself and of what it is doing; has it purpose, design, desire; has it heart and mind? In other words, is the Power a person—like man, only not limited as man is limited? Or is it the opposite to this—a strange, unseen force like electric-power or *ubwanga*?

There is no doubt about what numbers of Africans would say: but before we are able to give a general answer it is necessary to get the facts together. This we will make an attempt to do. Let us keep one thing in mind. The teaching of Christianity that the Maker of all things is a Father, and so a Person, has gone widely about among Africans, even among those who have not become true Christians, and it has had the tendency to make their ideas clearer than they were before. Our desire now is to see what belief Africans had before that teaching came to them. It will not be surprising if we come to a decision that in some ways their idea was uncertain.

## CHAPTER IV

### A PERSON AND A SPIRIT

#### (1) *The Power is a Spirit*

IN the old stories which have come down to us it is said frequently that men had talks with God and He with them; and that He was living among men. It is sometimes even said that He is a *untu*; but this is probably only a way of saying that He is like man in some things: He sees, He makes things, He does things. He has no form which men may see with their eyes.

Most Africans are in agreement with an old Pygmy who said: 'Who is able to make an image of *Kmvum*? He has no body. See, *Kmvum* is like a word which comes out of your mouth. Make, then, an image of it and come with it to me!' And he went on: 'The word! It is no more; it is past; and still it is living all the time—to-day and to-morrow! So is *Kmvum*!'

Africans would say 'Yes' to the words of Bilembe, one of the Bangala of the Congo, when the question was put to him: 'Have you ever seen *Djakomba*?' He said: '*Djakomba* has no ears, no nose, no eyes, no chest, no arms, no stomach, no legs. It is not possible to see him—no more than to see the *elili* (soul) of a man.'

There is something strange in man which comes and goes and is at work in his breathing and acting. When it goes away the body is without life; it is dead. Some Africans say it may come back into another body—while it is away it still has existence but without a body. What is it? The ideas which men have of the unseen are pictures; they are able only to say: 'It is like so-and-so'; then, to be short, they may say: 'It is so-and-so.' So of the something inside man: 'It is like breath; it is like shade; it is breath, it is shade.' Africans are not the only people who make use of such words. In the Bible it is said God has *ruach*, God is *pneuma*; and the earliest sense of those words is 'breath' or 'wind.' They are picture words. When we are talking of the Spirit of God, and when we say God is a

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

spirit, our thought is not that God has breath or that God is wind. When you take everything away from man which we may see, the rest, we say, is spirit. And we make another picture in our mind and say: 'God is spirit.' He has no body and is not shut up in any one place. His power is at work in the sun, in the thunder and rain, in the growth of all plants and living beings; but He is outside these things. He has control over them. He is not the force of the thunder; He is the Lord of the thunder.

### (2) *The Power is a Person*

Most Africans would be in agreement with what we have said. Some of the names which they give to the Power give support to the opinion that they take Him to be a person. These names are like the names men give to men. *Nyambe*, *Leza*, *Chembe*, and others, are not different as names from *Chaka*, *Sebituane*, *Moshesh*. As we will see later, prayers are offered to *Leza* and in these prayers the name is said as if it was the name of a chief. The 'pronouns' used are of the 'noun'-group in which are the words for persons; we say, *Leza wa . . . mu . . .*—'God, He . . . Him . . .' But though a person and a spirit, He is not like other spirits which at one time had bodies and some day may have them again.

In other words, Africans make a picture in their minds of the Highest Power as a Spirit and a Person who is not, and at no time was, a man. They do not make a picture of Him as something like *ubwanga*.

## CHAPTER V

### OTHER ARGUMENTS

#### (1) *Reasons for Doubt*

IS what we said in Chapter IV true, however, of all Africans? There are some facts which seem to make it impossible to say 'Yes' to that question. Let us take a look at these facts. First, certain tribes do not have a true name for the Power; second, some tribes give worship to images; and last, some tribes make prayers to natural things, like the sun.

#### (2) *Modimo and Mulungu*

There are some names which do not come in the first noun-group. The Suto and Chwana say *modimo*. This is not a true name like *Nyambe* and *Leza*; it is the same word as *muzimu* which, by other tribes, is used for the spirit of a dead man. You are not able to say *ba-Leza*, because there is only one *Leza*; but you may say *midimo* for more than one *modimo*. The Suto, when talking of *modimo*, say *oona*, not *een*: 'it,' not 'he.'

A number of tribes in East Africa make use of the word *Mulungu* or *Mungu*, and this, like *modimo*, is the general word for spirit. The spirit of a dead man, some say, is *mulungu*; there is *mulungu* and there are *milungu*. And when it is used of the Spirit which is over all spirits, probably the sense is, *Mulungu* is the great *muzimu* of all men, formed by the coming together into one of all *mizimo*.

While this may be true there is no doubt that some Suto and Chwana took *Modimo*, and some Africans of the East took *Mulungu*, in the sense that other Africans took *Leza* and *Nyambe*; that is to say he was looked upon as a person. Other names used by them make this clear. Chwana say that *Modimo* is *Montshi*—'the Giver'; *Modihi*—'the Maker'; *Mothei*—'He who got things fixed'; *Mothodi*—'He by whom things came into being.' At one time it was against the law for common people

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

(not chiefs or medical men) to say *Modimo* of the Great Spirit. The word was so holy that it might not be used in normal everyday talk, though in prayers it might be said.

### (3) *The Use of Images*

Some Africans, on the other hand, make images and some have material things at which prayers are offered. A bit of wood is cut into the form of a man or woman; a pillar of wood or a stone is put up; or some other thing is looked upon as holy. People say their prayers in front of these things and make their offerings there. Are we to say, then, that Africans give worship to stone and wood? The prayers are said as if to the *mizimu* or to the High God. Are we to say that, in the belief of these Africans, God is a thing of wood or stone? No.

The people of Ashanti have a belief that everything has its *sunsum* (spirit). Before a tree is cut down for making a seat (stool) or drum, the approval of its *sunsum* has to be got. An egg is broken against the tree and this prayer is said: 'Osese tree, take this egg and have a bite of it. . . . May the person seated on you have long life. May I not be cut by the knife.' It seems that the prayer is said to the tree (whose name is *Osese*), but in fact it is said to the *sunsum*.

The Ashanti people have, in addition, what are named *abosom*. Some of these are brass basins into which are put a number of medical substances. Then a prayer is said, something like this: *Ta Kwesi, ye re si wo ama ye anya nkwa, mma ye nya'wuo mma y'aso nsi, mma ye kote nso nwu; kuro yi 'dekuro nkwa so, mmerante, nkwa so, mmawofoo nkwa so, 'kuro yi nkwada nkwa so. Y'afa 'guane y'afa akoko y'afa nsa ye de re be ma wo ama w'ahena 'kuro yi mu afwe 'kuro yi nkwa so.* That is: 'Ta Kwesi, we are giving you a place, we are putting you (here), so that we may have long life; do not let us be taken by death; do not let us become feeble; life to the head of this place; life to the young men of this place; life to those who give birth, and life to the boys and girls of this place. We have taken a sheep and a fowl, we have taken wine, we are about to give them to you so that you will not go from this town but will take care of its life.' The animals are offered, the blood dropping upon the basin. The prayer is said to *Ta Kwesi*, who is one of the sons of *Nyame*, the Great

## OTHER ARGUMENTS

God. The desire of the worshippers is that he will come to the town for ever. This basin is got ready as his 'shrine,' or living-place. It is an *obosom* and *Ta Kwesi* is an *obosom*. Though the same word is used, the shrine and the god are not the same. *Ta Kwesi* is able to come and go at his pleasure. In Ashanti places of worship there are numbers of shrines without gods now; the gods were in them for a time, and possibly they may come back again, but for a time the shrines are nothing but basins.

It is so with images. So long as the spirit is not inside, they are nothing but bits of wood.

Images of the Highest Being are not common in Africa. In fact there are almost no images of Him. And when a man puts up a stone, or the stem of a tree, cutting the wood roughly into the form of a man, and says: 'This is God,' we are not to take his words narrowly. No doubt some people may take the tree to be God Himself; but others have the thought that it is God's house (shrine). A third view is possible: that the tree may simply be a sign to the eyes that God is present.

Among the Venda of the Transvaal an owner of cattle makes a selection of one of the best and gives it a name: *Mankhulu*—'father's father.' When he makes an offering of beer to the *mizimu*, some of it is dropped on the animal's back, and before taking the first sugar-plant as food, he makes an offering of its 'flower,' saying: 'Take the flower with joy, *Mankhulu*, and let us have the stem, so that we may take it as food with happy hearts.' If the ox is dead and the man has no other, the sign-reader says to him: 'Go and get a stone in the river; it will be your ox.' Then the prayers and offerings will be made at this stone. The stone and the ox are here to be taken as signs which are pointing to something quite different from themselves. Worshippers are helped by having something material upon which their attention may be fixed, and which puts them in mind of what they are not able to see and put their hands upon. It is a great error when men take the sign for that of which it is the representative.

## CHAPTER VI

### TAKING PART FOR ALL

#### (1) *Heaven*

WE take up now a third argument, that is, the statement that certain Africans give worship to great natural forces. What we said in the last chapter may give us help in seeing how far this is true.

The Thonga of South Africa say that *Tilo* is the greatest power. They have a song: 'Oh! how good it would be to get a line and go up by it to heaven (*tilwen*); I would go there for rest.' But *Tilo* is something more than a place; it is a power which does things, a power and not a person, though sometimes it is named *Hosi*—'Lord.' It has control over rain and thunder, death, and births at which two babies come from the mother. Of a child it is said *a ni Tilo*—'he is with heaven,' when he is ill in a certain way.

The Ewe people of West Africa give the same name *Mawu* to God and to the sky, and seem to take them for one and the same. 'All my life I have been looking up to the sky which is seen as if to God; when I said words of God I said them of the sky, and when my words were of the sky my thoughts were of God.' So said one Ewe man; and another said: 'Wherever the sky is, there is God, because the sky is God.' The light coming from the sky is, they say, the oil which *Mawu* puts on his body; the blue colour of the sky is the thin net which *Mawu* keeps in front of his face; and the clouds, in all their changing colours and forms, are the clothing and ornaments which *Mawu* puts on from time to time.

#### (2) *The Sun*

The Luyi of Northern Rhodesia take the sun to be the same as *Nyambe*. When it comes up they make a loud cry: 'See our

## TAKING PART FOR ALL

king!' and they give worship saying: '*Mangwe! Mangwe! Mangwe!*' The Pare of Tanganyika Territory give the name *Ithuwa*—'sun,' to the Highest Being. Early in the morning, the father of a family takes beer in his mouth, puts it out in the direction of the sun, and makes this prayer: 'Oh *Ithuwa*, Chief, who made men and cattle and trees and grass, you who go by overhead, take a look at him who says curses to me! When you have come up in the morning may he see you; but when you go down in the evening, may he see you no more! But if I have myself done wrong, may death come to me before you go down!'

### (3) *The Rain*

Other Africans make mind-pictures of the rain as God. In the language of the Ila there is the word *imvula*—'rain,' but generally when they see rain they say *Leza wawa*—'God is falling.' Praise-names for *Leza* are: *Shakatabwa*—'the Faller';—*Lubolekamasuko*—'He who makes the masuko fruit go bad'; *Mangwe*—'He who puts the land under water'; when they *bonga* (*tembaula*)<sup>1</sup> *Leza* they say: *Lubombolangulu-maumbuswa-nchitalani*—'He who makes ant-hills soft, but he has no power over the *maumbuswa* ant-hills'; *Wakazuzhakalambwelambwe, katende kanakasha kamukachila*—'He is able to make full the hollows of one sort and another, but the little footprint of the Oribi overcomes him.' When the rain is not enough they say: *Leza watukatazha kutawa*—'*Leza* gives us trouble by not falling'; and when there is an outburst of rain they say: *Leza wawisha*—'*Leza* is falling overmuch.' When they say that *Leza* is *Shintemwe*—'One who has pity,' it is the rain which is in their thoughts.

On the other hand, numbers of Ila, if not all of them, are certain that *Leza* is not the water which comes down from the clouds: *Leza* sends the rain. *Walosha menzhi*, they say—'He makes water come down.' At a time when there was no rain an old man said to the writer of this book: '*Leza* has become old. That is our opinion, because the water which he sends down is said to be like drops from the eyes of men crying. So it is when one gets old; when he is crying he lets water go in thin drops down his chest; and that is how *Leza* is judged to be to-day—old, very old.'

<sup>1</sup> The sense of *bonga* and *tembaula* is 'to say the praise-names of a person.'

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

### (4) *Earth-shock*

In the Transvaal, where the Venda are, there was an earth-shock and all the people made a great cry, the women lu-lu-lu-ing and the men E-e-e-ing, and all making a noise with their hands. It was as if they were giving respect to a great Chief. When the question was put, 'Why do you do this?' the answer was: '*Mwari* has come! It is *Raluvimbi*!' The Venda have the two names for God; *Mwari* being the name they have taken over from the Kalanga. But *Raluvimbi*, or *Mwari*, is in their thoughts much more than simply an earth-shock: he is the Maker of everything.

### (5) *The End of this Argument*

From these examples we may see how Africans take the part for the complete thing. The complete thing is outside the range of their mind; that which is seen and in touch with everyday life is enough for everyday use. They make a selection from among the greatest of the Maker's works and signs of His power—the sky, the sun, the rain, an earth-shock—and give attention to these as if they were the Maker Himself. We have seen how the Ashanti people give the same name (*obosom*) to the shrine and to the god who comes into the shrine; how the Ila give the same name to rain and to the sender of the rain. Probably some of those people who say prayers to the sun are conscious that the Maker of the sun is other than, and greater than, the sun itself. Thoughts come to men through the eyes; they may say things about what they see while their thoughts go on farther to what they are not able to see. The thing seen is a sign (symbol) of the unseen. Then to say that the sun is God is only a way of talking.

African verse-makers, like all others, are strongly given to comparison. It would be foolish to take their words narrowly. The picture which they have a desire to put into the mind of hearers is more than the sense given by the words. They make a suggestion, not a statement of fact. In the *lithoko* of the Suto, for example, the ox is said to be *molimo o nko e metsi*—'the god with the wet nose'; and the great Chief Moshoeshoe is said to be *pharu e telele-telele*—'a very great hollow in a moun-

## TAKING PART FOR ALL

tain, a strong place.' We are conscious of the sense it is desired to give. In sayings about God there is frequently the same sort of suggestion. A European verse-maker may say, 'stars are drops in the eye of the eternal God.' Possibly it was a verse-maker of the Masai who said that the stars are the eyes of God, the thunder His cry of joy; that when the cattle are getting fat in the long rain-time the rain-drops come from His eyes because He is weeping with joy at seeing the fat cows; and in the dry part of the year, when cattle get thin because grass is poor, if there are rain-drops it is because He is weeping with sorrow.

We have now given an answer to the question: Is the Highest Being a person or a power in the belief of Africans? There is room for doubt about some of the tribes; but generally it may be said that He is looked upon as a Person, though the idea of what 'person' is may not be very clear in the mind of Africans.

## CHAPTER VII

### ONE GOD OR MORE? (I)

#### (1) *Worship not given to one Spirit only*

WE come now to another important question: Is it the belief of Africans that there is one God only, or are there a number of beings to be worshipped?

It would be impossible to give the name of a tribe by which all its worship is offered to one spirit only. They may be quite certain that there is one High God only, though giving Him different names, but they give deep respect and worship to numbers of other beings in addition, of a lower sort. In fact, they may give all worship to these and not any to the High God, though conscious of His existence.

#### (2) *The Unseen People of the Tribe*

Africans have a very strong group-feeling. We see this in the family, in the tribe, and in other groupings. And in their thoughts, society is made up of the people who are living here now in the body and those who are living, for the time, out of the body—those who are named by foolish people, ‘the dead.’ Those who have gone on are not far away; they are still in touch with their friends here. In fact, all have a need for one another. The *mizimu* are not able to do without people here; and people here have a need for the help of the *mizimu*. If these are not well taken care of, and given things as signs of respect, they may get angry and make one of the family ill; then the ‘sign-reader’ is requested to say, after putting the question by his instruments, which *muzimu* has wounded feelings, and what is to be done to put them away and make him pleased, so that the person who is ill may get well again. So an offering will be made and prayers.

There is more than one sort of *muzimu*. A man may have a special *muzimu* watching over him, possibly the spirit of his

## ONE GOD OR MORE? (I)

father's father, who goes with him everywhere and keeps him safe from danger. There are *mizimu* of the family, on the father's side and on the mother's. The *mizimu* of the headman may be the *mizimu* of the town or group. Some of the great *mizimu*, noted Chiefs who were living on earth in old times and have not had a second birth, are *mizimu* of all the tribe. It may be that the memory that they were ever on earth goes out of mind, and in the thoughts of men they become mixed with the Highest Being. It is sometimes not possible to be quite certain that a High God among Africans was not at one time a man living here on earth.

Prayers are said to all these *mizimu*. Feasts are made in their honour. They are present, and take part in these feasts. Such is the belief of the Africans.

A very general belief is that these *mizimu* are go-betweens: they are in the middle, with men on one side and God on the other. They are representatives of men to God, of God to men. God is so great and so far away that, in the same way as you do not put your cause straight away to a great Chief himself but only through his headmen, so in coming to God you come by way of the *mizimu*. These were men like ourselves; they still are men at heart though out of the body. They have knowledge of our needs from the inside and have power to give us help. A Zulu put the general thought of Africans into words when he said: 'We give worship to those who are of us and have knowledge of our way of living.'

## CHAPTER VIII

### ONE GOD OR MORE? (II)

#### (i) *The Orisha*

MEN'S thought of the Unseen is formed as a copy of the seen. Where a nation has a great king with important persons in authority under him, people frequently have had the idea of a God seated in a circle of great spirits through whom the earth is ruled.

The Yoruba nation of West Africa has as its head the Alafin, who is generally shut up in his great house, and when on special days he comes out, it is with his face covered. Under him there are a number of responsible men—the chief sign-reader, for example. The towns are ruled by the Alafin's men, named Bale. There is a very complete organization all through the country.

As the Alafin is the Chief Ruler of Yorubaland, with numbers of Bale under him, so *Olorun* is pictured as the Chief Ruler in Heaven, with hundreds of *Orisha* under him. The sense of the name *Olorun* is 'Owner of Heaven'; he is named in addition, *Eleda*—'Maker and keeper of all existence'; *Alaye*—'Owner of life'; *Olodumare*—'He who has all power.' If you put the question to a Yoruba, 'Who made us? Who keeps us, has care of us? Who gives us food and rain and the light of the sun?' the answer is *Olorun ni*—'It is *Olorun*.' He is pictured as being made up of thousands of eyes, but there are no images of him. No offerings are ever given to him, and prayers are made to him only at special times. *Olorun* is so very great that men have to come to him through the *Orisha*. He has put into their hands the rule over men and things.

The most important *Orisha* is *Ifa*, who has to do with sign-reading: his help is requested before any important act, such as getting married, putting up a house, going to war, and making peace. Women come to him with prayers when they have desire for children. Another name for him is *Ela*, which

## ONE GOD OR MORE? (II)

gives the sense of a strong saviour, whom not even death is able to overcome. Another *Orisha* is *Obutala*, of whom it is said that after *Olorun* had made all things roughly he put them into *Obutala*'s hands for the last touches and for control in the future. *Odudua* is said to be the wife of *Obutala*. These two are pictured as two cut calabashes, one over the other, kept in the places of worship as the sign of the meeting of earth and sky.

*Odudua*, it is said, gave birth to other *Orisha* and these again gave birth to others. One of these was *Shango*, the *Orisha* of the light which comes with thunder. Some people, however, say that *Shango* was at one time a man, a *munganga*, who said that he was able to put people to death by sending fire from his mouth: when death overtook him he went up to Heaven and became an *Orisha*. One song about him goes like this:

O *Shango*, you are the chief!  
You take in your hand the fire-stones  
To send punishment upon wrong-doers,  
That your angry feeling may have an outlet;  
Everything touched by them comes to a sudden end;  
The woodland is food for the fire,  
The trees are broken down,  
And all living things are put to death.

The image of *Shango* is generally given the form of a man, upright, with three smaller images, his wives, placed near to him.

*Orishako* is the *Orisha* of the farm: his house is to be seen in almost every Yoruba town. He is given worship at the time of the new moon. His female priests have so much power that all men are in fear of wounding their feelings. They are taken to be the wives of the *Orisha*, and at the time of the feast when the sweet-potatoes are ready they are free from sex-rules.

To all these *Orisha* prayer and blood-offerings are made for the people by the priests, who, after saying prayers in their name, put an animal to death and let its blood out on the earth.

### (2) *The Obosom*

The Akan of Ashanti are another people who have a great king with a number of chief men under him. Their name for God is *Onyankopon* or *Onyame*, of whom it is said, *Asase terew na*

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

*Onyame ne panyin*—‘Of all the wide earth *Onyame* is the chief wise one,’ and, *Wope aka asem akyere Onyankopon a, ka kyere mframa*—‘If you have desire to say anything to *Onyankopon*, say it to the winds.’

Everywhere in the land may be seen altars to *Onyame* in the form of a forked branch cut from a certain tree named *Onyame dua*,—‘God’s tree.’ Between the branches, which are cut short, is placed a basin, or a pot, into which offerings are put for him. He has priests as his servants, and places of worship. At the same time the thought of the Akan is that *Onyame* has given most of his powers to the *abosom* who are his representatives. The story is that these are his sons whom he sent down to earth; they had names which are now names of rivers and stretches of water. The chief of them are *Tano*, *Bosomtwe*, *Bea*, and *Opo*. Waters in Ashanti, some in a greater, others in a smaller degree, are all looked upon as having in them the power or spirit of *Nyankopon* and so being a great life-giving force.

These *abosom* have their priests and shrines where prayers and blood-offerings are made to them.

### (3) *The Lubare*

On the other side of Africa, the Ganda are an example of expert organization. At the head of the government there is the Kabaka, under whom (before the British came) the country was ruled by head-chiefs, the most important of whom was the Katikiro. No common man was able to take business to the Kabaka himself; he had to put it first before the Katikiro, who gave a decision or took it to the Kabaka. Every one of the divisions of the country (*amasaza*) had its head-chief, with other chiefs under him, and these head-chiefs made up the Lukiko, the controlling body of the nation.

In the same way—such was the idea of the Ganda—the Unseen was ruled by *Katonda*, who had *lubare* under him to give help in ruling. *Katonda* was named ‘Father of the gods’ because he had made all things, the *lubare* among them. His place of worship was only a small house, and offerings of cattle were made to him only at special times. The *lubare* were taken by the Ganda to be the working-managers. These had their places of worship and priests, who kept their fires burning,

## ONE GOD OR MORE? (II)

year in, year out. When a person had a desire to come near a *lubare* he went to the place of worship and a priest took his offering and gave the *lubare* the reason for his coming. The answer to his prayer came through a *mandwa* (a person in touch with spirits) and the priest gave the sense of it. The *lubare* seem to have been men at one time: they became *lubare* after death. The chief of them was *Mukasa*, the *lubare* who gave increase of food, cattle, and young. *Nalwanga*, the chief wife of *Mukasa*, was the helper of women in giving birth. *Kibuka* was the *lubare* of war; *Bungu* of hunting. And there were others.

### (4) *The Argument*

These three examples, two from West Africa and one from the east, are enough for our purpose. From them we see clearly how men's thought of the Unseen is a copy of the things which they see. As there is a king on earth, so there is a King in the sky. And under Him there are other beings who are given power, even as the chief men of a king are given power for ruling in his name.

## CHAPTER IX

### ONE GOD OR MORE?—THE EARTH MOTHER

#### (1) *What the Jukun People say*

A NUMBER of African tribes have the idea that all things have come to birth as an outcome of the coming together of Sky and Earth. The Earth is taken by them to be a female God—or the living-place of a female God. This is a natural mind-picture.

The two great gods of the Jukun, a people in Nigeria, are *Chido* and *Ama*. *Chido*, a male, is one with the Sun, while *Ama*, a female, is one with the Earth. *Ama* is the maker of everything which has life and growth. With *Chido* present, it is said, *Ama* puts together the body of man, bone by bone, as a woman makes her pot, bit by bit. If a baby is from birth unpleasing or damaged in form, it is because *Ama*'s hand made a slip. Some of the Jukun say that when *Ama* has made the body, *Chido* puts life into it by breathing upon it. *Chido* gives grain to men, but it is *Ama* who makes it and puts into it life-making qualities. When death comes to men they go back to *Ama*—to *Kindo*, the under-land, from where they came and from where they may a second time go up for birth.

#### (2) *What the Ibo People say*

By the Ibo of Nigeria, the great Mother is named *Ale*. Her images take the form of a woman with a child in her arms. The general belief is that she is the wife of *Chi* (whose other names are *Chuku*, *Chineke*), who has his living-place far away in the highest part of the sky. The earth is *Ale*'s body and gave birth to all living things. She is said to have authority over the thousands of lower spirits whose business it is to take care of, and be the helper of, men and animals: every one of these spirits is a part of *Ale*, coming from her as light comes from

## ONE GOD OR MORE?

the sun. One of these is *Ibinokpabi*: she has the power to make women fertile, and to make things go well for men in trading and in war.

### (3) *What the Ibibio People say*

So the Ibibio, another Nigerian people, have deep respect for *Eka Abassi*, the mother of all gods and men and things. From her comes everything, even the very smallest of living things, and every stick and leaf, stone and water-drop; in everything there is some part of her. Her true name is secret—no man has knowledge of it. ‘She is not like other gods,’ the Ibibio say in a very quiet voice, ‘she it is who has her living-place on the other side of the wall.’ Unfertile women go to her holy water-hole and make prayers and offerings, saying: ‘O *Abassi ma!* keeper of souls! What have I done to make you angry? Give me grace, because I have never given birth to a child and am shamed before all women. See! here is what I give. My prayer is that you may have pity on me and give me a child! Do only this and all my life I will be your servant!’

There are other tribes who are in agreement, more or less, with the tribes which have been named. The Earth, they say, is the great Mother.

### (4) *The Argument*

Well, then, in addition to *Lubare* and *Orisha* and *Obosom*, we have in Africa this belief in the Earth Mother—a belief which people in other countries have. This is another fact in support of what we have said, that numbers of Africans do not give all honour and worship to one great Being.

## CHAPTER X

### WHY AFRICANS GIVE WORSHIP TO A NUMBER OF BEINGS

#### (1) *The Argument of these Last Chapters*

IF then we take a general view of their beliefs as outlined in chapters vii.-ix., we see that the Africans are conscious of living under the control of a great number of spirit-beings. There is, over all, the Highest—*Leza*, *Nyambe*, *Katonda*, or whatever name is given to Him. In addition, there are the *orisha*, *balubare*, *abosom*, some with more power than others. And there are other spirits in trees and rivers and mountains, some of whom, no doubt, if not all, were men at one time. In addition to all these, Africans put their faith in *malembe*—things through which that strange force named *ubwanga* does its work, and by the help of which men may get long life and happy days.

#### (2) *The Reasons for it*

When an old priest of Ashanti was requested to say why he did not put all his faith in *Onyame*, he gave this answer:

“We in Ashanti have a fear of worshipping *Onyame* only, or the female Earth-god only, or any one spirit. We have to keep ourselves safe from, and make use of when we are able, the spirits of all things in the sky and upon earth. You go to the dark woodland, see some animal, let off your gun at it, and see that you have put a man to death. You send away your servant, but later you see your need for him. You take your knife for the purpose of cutting off what you take to be a branch, and, see, you have made a cut in your arm. There are people who have the power of changing themselves into leopards; the grass-land people are specially good at turning into hyenas. There are evil women who are able to make your life-stream dry and come to an end. There are trees which come down on top of you, causing your death. There are rivers which put you to

## WHY AFRICANS WORSHIP A NUMBER OF BEINGS

death. If I see four or five Europeans, I do not make much of one only and have nothing to do with the rest, because these others may have power and may come to have hate for me.'

A Chagga man made it clear why his people do honour to the *mizimu* more than to *Ruwa*, the Highest Being. He said:

'If you put the question to them they will give this answer: "When the Chief sends requesting something which he has a right to, and on that day you have nothing to give, whom will you make an attempt to make peace with—the Chief, or his servant, so that he will say well of you to the Chief and the Chief may have mercy on you? And if you give a rough answer to the spirit who is sent to you, or will not give that which the sign-reader has said it is wise for you to give (that is, make a blood-offering), that spirit will go to *Ruwa* and say things against you and *Ruwa* will get angry and will send another spirit, a strange spirit who is not of your family, to make you very unhappy and put you to death. For this reason we do more honour to the spirits." These are the words of the old men about *Ruwa* and the spirits.'

The reasons are clear enough. In the belief of Africans all power is not in the hands of one unseen being, not even the highest. There is distribution of power. A number of beings are able to make men unhappy. It is good sense, the Africans say, to get on the right side of all who may be able to do men damage or give them help.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE RELATION OF GOD AND MAN

#### (1) *How God and Man became separate*

WE have now to put the question: What in the belief of Africans is the relation of God and man? The first thing to be noted is this: Africans say that God made them and that at the start God was living on earth with men; but after a time He went away from them, very far.

#### (2) *Some Stories from West Africa*

The Ewe of West Africa say that in those early times the sky was so near the earth that it might be touched by men's hands. *Mawu*, the Highest Being, was then very near. When men made fire the smoke got into *Mawu*'s eyes and gave him pain; after a time he became tired of this and went far away. Some say that in those days people got their hands clean by giving them a rub on the sky and that grain-stampers were pushed by them into *Mawu*'s face; so *Mawu* got angry and went off to a great distance.

The Fang of Gaboon say that *Nyame* took away with him all animals and all things when he went off with wounded feelings; but after a time, seeing how men were in trouble he sent animals back, together with fire and some necessary things.

The Fioti of the Congo say that in early times men would not be at peace, tribe with tribe, man with man, as they were ordered to be by *Nzambi*. As a punishment, *Nzambi* sent them disease and other troubles. They made loud cries for help, and *Nzambi* came down to them, but they would not give ear to his words: they all kept on crying out loud, saying yes, they had done wrong, but protesting that others were responsible for their wrong-doing. *Nzambi* got tired of the noise, went away and did not come back again.

## THE RELATION OF GOD AND MAN

### (3) *Nyambe and Kamonu*

The Rotse of Northern Rhodesia say that at first *Nyambe* was living on earth with his wife *Nasilele*, and with Kamonu and his wife, the first man and woman formed by him, and with the animals which he had made. When Kamonu saw *Nyambe* making a spoon of wood, or working iron, he quickly did the same. One day Kamonu put a sharp point to a bit of iron, and with it put a lechwe to death. He did this to a number of animals and took them as food. This made *Nyambe* angry, and he said: 'Your ways are bad, oh Kamonu, these animals are your brothers; it is not good for you to put them to death and take them for food.' Kamonu did not give attention to *Nyambe*'s words, and so he was sent away. After a year he came back, and *Nyambe*, overlooking his wrong-doing, gave him land for farming. When the grain was almost ready, buffaloes and eland came at night into the fields and did much damage, and Kamonu put some of them to death. He sent the tails to *Nyambe*, saying: 'What am I to do with the meat?' and *Nyambe* gave answer: 'Take it for food.' After this, death took Kamonu's dog and his child, and when he went to give *Nyambe* an account of what had taken place, he saw child and dog there, living. He made a request for something to keep death away, but *Nyambe* said: 'I will not give you the power of life.'

After this *Nyambe* went across a great stretch of water to be away from man, but Kamonu made a boat and went after him. Then *Nyambe* made a great mountain and went to the top of it, but Kamonu went up to him. *Nyambe* sent servants to see if there was any place on earth where he might be free from Kamonu, but by this time the earth was full of Kamonu's offspring, so there was no place. It was then *Nyambe*'s design to go away from the earth completely. He made a suggestion to the animals to go with him, but the animals said they had no fear of man and would go on living as they were. So *Nyambe* took his wife, *Nasilele*, they went across the river and got Spider to make a very long thread and they went up to the sky by it. Spider's eyes were put out and the thread was cut, so that he might not see where they went and so that nobody might have knowledge of the road to *Nyambe*'s living-place.

Men made an attempt to get there. Kamonu put up a

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

high tower of trees, but before it was high enough the base gave way and the tower came down, causing the death of the men who were upon it. Kamonu then gave up all attempt to come into touch with *Nyambe*, and from that day to this relations between man and God have been broken.

### (4) *Kyumbi and Kiriamagi*

The Pare people of Tanganyika Territory give another twist to the story of how God and men went their separate ways. They say that *Kyumbi* gave men cattle and fruits and knowledge of farming, and that at first *Kyumbi* and men were living together in harmony. But the harmony was broken by the coming of one named *Kiriamagi*—‘He who makes food of eggs.’ *Kyumbi* had given orders that men were not to take eggs for food, but *Kiriamagi* put it into their hearts to go against this rule. As punishment *Kyumbi* took away their food, causing the death of all but a young man and a young woman. When there had again been an increase in the number of men they said among themselves: ‘Come, let us put up a tower whose top will get to the upper land, so that we may go and make war against him who is there in his country.’ But *Kyumbi* gave them a look, as a man may give a look at ants, and said: ‘What are these little things down there?’ Then the earth gave a shake and the tower was broken in two, and the builders came to an end. *Kyumbi* then made a move to a greater distance, and from that time he has not been near men, but far, far away. Men went in search of him, desiring to get him to come down to them again, but they were unable: *Kyumbi* would not give attention to their prayers.

### (5) *Ruwa and a Strange Man*

The Chagga of Kilimanjaro have a like belief that men were taken on the wrong road at first by a strange man—they do not give him a name. They say that *Ruwa* gave the first man a banana-garden. In the middle of it he put a sort of plant named *Ula* or *Ukaho* and gave an order that it was not to be used for food. One day, however, a strange man came to the town and made a request for food. The headman said to him:

## THE RELATION OF GOD AND MAN

'Go into the banana-garden and take what you are in need of, but do not take the *ula*, because *Ruwa* has given me and my people orders not to take it for food.' The strange man made answer: 'It is now the middle of the day, and this morning early *Ruwa* said to me that I was to get a pot from you for cooking this *ula*, so that we might all have some of it together and be happy.' Acting in the belief that the strange man was sent by *Ruwa*, the headman gave him a cooking-pot. The strange man got the *ula* and put it into the pot; when it was cooked he and the headman had a meal of it. When this came to the ears of *Ruwa* he went and said to the headman and his people: 'Because you let yourselves be tricked by a strange man and took my *ula* for food, your bones will be broken and your eyes cut to bits, and at last death will overtake you.' From that day *Ruwa* has not sent word again to man. This is what old Chagga men say. Trouble came upon men because they went against God's orders.

### (6) *What these Stories make clear*

These stories make clear the belief of a great number of Africans, possibly of most of them, that at the start when God had made men, He and they were together on earth, living in harmony as friends; and that they are separate to-day, man on earth and God in some far-off living-place, because of man's wrong-doing or foolish behaviour. The Fang put this condition clearly in their song about *Fam*, the first man.

*Yeye, o la, yeye,  
Nzame e yo, Fam a si.  
Yeye, o la, yeye!  
Nzame, Nzame, Fam e Fam,  
Mur e nda, mur e nda zia.*

*Yeye, o la, yeye,  
God is high, man is low.  
Yeye, o la, yeye!  
God is God, man is man,  
By himself, for himself.*

## CHAPTER XII

### HAS GOD A HEART?

#### (1) *Reasons for Doubt*

IN His far-off living-place God is the controller of the great natural events: thunder and rain and other such things. Has He any interest in the common things of man's life? Has He a heart? Is His heart touched by a feeling for their unhappy condition? Africans are not certain about this. The rain which God sends upon the good and the bad gives them a thought of His care and pity. But there is such a number of things which seem in existence without good reason, and by these things doubts are caused about how far the God who is all-power is at the same time kind. There are pain and sorrow and death. If this is God's earth, did He make these things to be? If He is able to put an end to them, why does He not do so? If He is able, and still does not do so, then is He not cruel?

To Africans it is no comfort when it is said that God's eyes are fixed upon them. The thought only gives them fear. So the Ila say: *Notangala Leza udikubwene*—‘If you are happy, God sees you.’ The sense of this saying is not that you are happy because God's eyes are upon you for good. The sense is that when all goes well with you it is the time for some sudden blow to come upon you. A person whose children are all taken by death, or whom other sad events overtake, is named by the Ila, *mulabile-Leza*—‘one upon whom God's eyes are fixed.’

#### (2) *The Story of an Old Woman*

The Ila have a story about an old, old woman who was living on earth when the earth was still young. The hand of *Leza* was stretched out against her family. Death took off her mother and father while she was still a child, then later her husband and children, brothers and sisters. She said to herself: ‘I will keep the little ones seated on my legs,’ but no, even they, the

## HAS GOD A HEART?

children of her children, were taken from her. She became feeble, and it seemed to her that she herself was to be taken. But a change came over her; she became young again. Then came into her heart an overpowering desire to go looking for God and to put to Him the question: Why? Somewhere up there in the sky was His living-place if only she was able to get to it! She made a start by cutting down great trees and joining them together, and so planting a tall structure which would be as high as the sky. It got to be higher and higher, but one day the wood nearest the earth was broken by the weight, and down it all came. She made another attempt and still another, but with no effect. Then the thought came to her that possibly there was another way to God's living-place. In the far distance she saw where earth and sky seemed to be joined. So she went on a journey to that place, going through country after country, nation after nation, with the thought in her heart all the time: I will come to where God is and I will put the question to Him: 'What have I done to you that you give me such trouble?' People seeing this woman going about said to her: 'What have you come for?' And her answer was: 'I am looking for *Leza*.' 'Looking for *Leza*! Why?' 'My brothers, is there one in the nations who is troubled as I am?' 'Trouble! What trouble have you had?' 'This trouble. I am by myself. As you see me. I have nobody.' And they said: 'Yes, we see. That is how you are! All your friends, all your family—gone! In what way are you different from ourselves? *Shikakunamo* is seated on the back of every one of us and there is no shaking him off!' The woman did not get an answer to her sad question, Why? Her end was a broken heart (*yamuyaya inzezela*). And the old men of the Ila say that from her time to this day nobody has got the answer! *Leza* is still *Shikakunamo*—'He who is about us on all sides—and not for good.'

### (3) *God the Controller*

In most African tongues it is impossible to say 'it is an accident'—that is, an event without reason, a thing which comes by chance. Everything has a cause and reason. When men were first made, Africans seem to say, there was no death. Death came later. Now on the death of a person they commonly

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

put the question: 'By whom was the death caused? Was it a *mulozhi*? Was it a bad spirit?' When there seems to be no other reason they say: *ndufu lwaka Leza*—'It is a death which comes from God.' They may say: *Leza wakombola mungo wakwe*—'God's gourd is broken off by Him.' One of the names given by the Ila to *Leza* is *Ushatwakwe*—'The owner of his things.' This name makes clear one of the general ideas of Africans. Certain things are in His hands to do with as He is pleased to do. He may be at a great distance from men, but He keeps certain things under His control. Anything which they are not able to give an account of in other ways is certainly the act of God. A man who is ill and near to death, or who is troubled about the outcome of some undertaking, may get comfort from the thought: 'All is in *Nzambi*'s hand.' When a boat is taken in the violent current of the Congo River and seems to be out of control, and the boatmen are doing their best, but without effect, the chief gives answer, with a motion of his hand up to the sky, 'It is *Nzambi*'s business!' The belief of the Africans is that whatever may not be controlled or kept away by man, comes from God. Congo people say: *Kiatuka kuzulu ke kiayakananga ko*—'One is not able to put up a fight against what comes from Heaven.' When they come to the end of their powers, they say, 'Give it over to God': *mwana kalongwa Nzambi unkwa kunlonga*—'God will take in hand the bad child.'

### (4) *The Cause of Death*

Now in all these things it is very hard to make general statements about African belief. Men are so very different in their outlook. Beliefs are in a great degree dependent upon a man's make-up and experience. One man whose life is happy may have a very different idea of God from that of a man whose life is full of sorrow. Some men say that God is kind and good: others that He is unkind, cruel. These may be private ideas over against general ideas which are common to all the people in one society. Such general ideas are given in the stories which are handed down from generation to generation. We have put down a number of these stories in this book. Others, which have a wide distribution in Africa, are about how death came to the earth and are of great interest as giving some idea of the

## HAS GOD A HEART?

people's belief about God. It seems that Africans have had a desire not to make God responsible for death. Death came, they say, through men not giving attention to God's law, or through the foolish behaviour of somebody.

A great number of Africans have a feeling of hate for the Chameleon,<sup>1</sup> because they say that but for its very, very slow motion there would be no death among men. When men were first made, it is said, Chameleon was sent by God to take to them the news they would go on living for ever. But he took so long in getting there that the Hare (or, in other places, the small Lizard) got there first and said that death would take men away. From that time death comes to all.

There are other stories whose teaching is the same.

The Kaonde of Northern Rhodesia say that *Leza* gave the bird named Honeyguide three pots to take to the first man and woman. He said: 'Keep them shut, and when you put them into the hands of the people, say to them: "*Leza* says, this one and that one are to be got open now, they have in them seeds for planting; but the third one is to be kept unopen till I come.'" Honeyguide went off with the pots; on the road he made holes in two of them, and seeing that they had seeds in them, he got the holes stopped up again. When he made a hole in the third, out came disease and death and all sorts of cruel animals. Not even *Leza* had the power to get them all together again and shut away from doing damage. So Honeyguide is responsible for the evils which are on earth. For helping men in their fight for life, *Leza* then gave them plants with medical properties, and, in addition, gave them teaching how to make fire and how to make instruments out of iron.

The Lunda of Northern Rhodesia say that when *Nzambi* made the first man and woman he gave them orders not to go to sleep while the moon was walking the sky. The punishment for going against his order was to be death. The first man became old and his eyes feeble, and one night the moon got to the back of clouds and he was not able to see it. So he went to sleep and in sleep death took him.

In such stories as these the belief of the Africans is made clear to us.

We are faced by the troubles which are common to all men:

<sup>1</sup> Chameleon, a small animal which has the power of changing its colour.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

disease and death. Are these a sign that the Maker of all things is unkind? We see other signs that God is good: He gives rain and food and offspring and medical substances. Is He sometimes kind and sometimes unkind? Is there change of humour in Him as there is in men? God is controller of things and events. All is in His hands. His power is very great, but it is limited. It seems that He is not able to keep men in the right way when their desires are against it. He made man and other beings but they are not completely under His control; they have the power of selection: of taking their way, of going against God's orders. That is why some of the troubles have come—some of them, at least, are caused by man's wrong-doing. Man's wrong-doing or the wrong-doing of somebody: somebody took man off on a wrong road by going against the desires and designs of God; and in this way the future direction of men was fixed; they have no power to make it different. So much may be clear, but there are other things for which we are not able to see any reason. If only it were possible, Africans would be glad to have the certain belief that God is completely good. But their minds are clouded by the evil of life. That God has pity is not strange to numbers of Africans; but the idea of a God who is a saviour, who is working for the salvation of men from all evil, had not come to them before the good news of Jesus Christ was taken to them.

## CHAPTER XIII

# IS GOD THE LAW-GIVER AND JUDGE?

### (1) *Some more Questions*

AFRICANS are at all times conscious that there are things which may be done and things which may not be done. Trouble comes upon persons who do the things which may not be done. There are laws against which we may not go. The question we now put is: How far are Africans conscious that in doing wrong they are acting against God? Did He have anything to do with the making of the laws and the starting of rules of behaviour? Does He take note of what man does and give reward and punishment, in this life or in some future existence? Is God Law-giver and Judge? In other words, the question we put is: Have Africans any idea of 'sin,' in the sense in which the word is used by Christians: wrong-doing not against man but against God: and not wrong-doing only, but wrong thought, wrong feeling in relation to God.

It seems that some light, though not a full light, has come to Africans on this point. To some it has come more fully than to others.

### (2) *Laws made by God*

By most people the laws and customs<sup>1</sup> are looked upon as started by the men of earlier generations. But it is the belief of certain Africans that some, at any rate, were ordered by God. It is in part for this reason that He is named *Chilenga* ('He by whom things were started') by the Ila. The Kongo say there are *nkondo mi Nzambi* (laws of God), and if one is broken there is *sumu ku Nzambi* (act against God), the punishment for which is *lufwa lumbi*, a bad death. The three greatest crimes in the eyes of Africans are having sex relations inside the family or

<sup>1</sup> In most African languages there is a word for the idea of 'custom' which is different from the idea of 'law.' 'Custom' gives the sense of some way of doing things which is regular, normal, more or less fixed, without having the force of law.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

clan,<sup>1</sup> the putting of near relations to death, and the use of evil and unnatural powers—that is to say, *bulozhi*. The first of these acts has its punishment in itself generally—a curse working automatically. But the Kongo and others say the punishment comes straight from God. When a man is put to death by his blood-relation, a curse is resting upon the wrong-doer, say the Ila, till *luembe* is made. That is to say, a blood-offering is made of two oxen, and one of these is offered to the *mizimu*, who in turn take it to *Leza* to get him to put away his angry feelings against the wrong-doer.

In teaching their children, Chagga say: 'If a child is sent by his father or mother and if that child does not do what he is ordered to do, or if a child puts up a fight against father and mother and comes to blows with them, or if a child does evil, taking the things of others so that people put hands upon the property of the father, such a child is marked by *Ruwa* and will come to his death before he is married. And a bad man who keeps on taking the property of others and puts people to death, such a man is not able to keep his acts secret: there will come a day when *Ruwa* will put him into the hands of the judge for punishment. A man who is false to his country and lets in people to make war upon it, is marked by *Ruwa* and will come to an end with all his tribe; they will be cut down by *Ruwa* in their land. If a man does good, if he does not have secret designs against anyone, if he does not take what is not his, if he gives honour to the old and takes good care of them, *Ruwa* will take pleasure in him and give him the blessing of cattle and goats and children. Now, if you see a house which has a number of sorrows, there evil has been done by the owner and his fathers, and now *Ruwa* has sent a spirit of this family to make trouble among them. So, my child, have fear of evil, do well, and *Ruwa* will have joy and he will send you great blessing.'

God is, then, the Law-giver and Judge. Laws may be made by men, but they are God's laws. When men go against those laws they will be troubled. The punishment may come from

<sup>1</sup> Clan is used here in the sense of a group of men and women banded together as friends: they have a common name, which may be the name of an animal, a plant, or a thing which is respected by them and not taken as food. In some tribes a man takes the clan-name of his mother, in others the clan-name of his father.

## IS GOD THE LAW-GIVER AND JUDGE?

men, or it may be given by spirits, but God is at the back of them. The laws are the laws of God and the wrong-doer does wrong against God and for that reason the hand of God is against him. Such is the fixed belief of great numbers of Africans.

### (3) *Oaths and Curses*

It seems, in addition, that God is generally looked upon as giving ear to men's oaths. The name of God is much used in protesting that what a man says is true. For example, one of the Ila may say: *Leza we nina ukwiba pe, akudi ndeba utabuchesha*—‘Before God I did not take what is not mine; no; if I did then may you not see the start of the day.’ The idea is that if what he says is false God will put the false witness to death. So the Lamba of Northern Rhodesia say: *Kani nachita-po ichichintu Shyakapanga andye wopelo'yu*—‘If I did this thing may God Himself put me to death’ (or, ‘take me as food’). People will say, when this oath is used: ‘Do nothing to him, he has not done wrong, he has said a name of power.’

And sometimes God is named in a curse. For example, a Kongo father may say to his child who has no respect for his words: ‘I, your father, by *Nzambi mpungu*, who has made you with your fingers and nails, you will go from here wandering, and come to an end.’

### (4) *In the Future*

Some Africans have the belief that a man's condition after death is dependent upon his behaviour in the present. They say his spirit goes down into the under-land to God—*kuzimu ku Leza*—who is judge of the dead. He gives a decision against thieves and against those who take another man's wife or put another man to death; and these become *vibanda* or *viwa* (evil spirits). He puts the good into the position of *impashi*, good, kind spirits. This is not a common belief, though probably all Africans made a division of spirits into good and bad. If a man's death is good, the Kongo say, he goes to the town of the older generations where there are a great number of pleasing things such as are desired by men, but if, on the other hand, the death is bad, if the man has been a *kimpumbulu*, that is, one

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

by whom all the laws of the early fathers of the tribe are broken, he will become a *tebo*, an evil thing with red hair, walking the earth without rest, in touch with *ndoki*, evil men and women. But it is not clear that their future condition is fixed by God.

But the punishment is not only in the future. It comes upon men in this life. The Konde of Northern Nyasaland say that *Kyala* sometimes comes among men in the body of a lion or snake and sees their doings. He is a God of righteousness and comes only when evil is very great and punishment is needed. For that reason the desire of the people is that God will go away again. 'Go far from here, O God, go to the Sango, because your house is great'—this is a prayer not uncommonly on the lips of the people when it seems to them that God is near.

From all this it is clear that numbers of Africans have the belief that God is a God of righteousness. What the righteousness is which is desired by Him in the men He has made—this is another question!

## CHAPTER XIV

### AFRICANS AT PRAYER

#### (1) *Belief and Prayer*

THE belief of men about God may be judged by what they say of Him in their stories and everyday talk, and by their behaviour. It is probably even more clearly seen in their prayers. If men have the idea of God as a loving Father they will naturally have pleasure in talking with Him every day and possibly taking to Him as a sign of their love such offerings as in their opinion are desired by Him. If their idea of God is that He is a Great Chief, living at a great distance, they may come to Him only at special times, when their need is greatest, and then say their prayers and give their offerings through somebody who is between Him and them.

Now, as we saw before, Africans do have the idea of God as far-off, the controller of great forces. They have knowledge of what prayer is—that is to say, they have a belief that unseen spirits are able to give ear to their words and are ready to give an answer. But generally they do not go straight to God. They have the idea that He is so good that it is not necessary to make requests to Him; or that because He is the Owner of all things He has no need for anything they are able to give Him; or that He is so far away that it is not possible for them to get near to Him. They make their prayers and offerings to *mizimu*, who were men and still are near and have knowledge of them. If at times they go straight to God it is because they are not able to get help from others; it is the last step when other hopes are at an end: the power of the *suman* has gone, the *mizimu* do nothing; the *abosom* and *orisha* and *lubare* give no attention; then men go to God. This, however, is not true of all Africans. The Akan of Ashanti, as we said before, have altars near all their houses and, day by day, put upon them offerings to *Nyame*, and these offerings are possibly prayers without words. Like the Akan, other Africans may make prayers to God and to *mizimu* at one and the same time.

(2) *The Form of Prayer*

By their form we may make a division of prayers into two sorts: (a) unvoiced prayers, (b) voiced prayers.

(a) *Unvoiced Prayers*.—The old Chwana were of opinion that it was wrong for God's name, *Modimo*, to be used by common people, but there were regular ways of requesting His help by signs. The first finger of the right hand was made wet with water from a man's mouth, then put between the first finger and thumb of the left hand and pointed to the clouds. Or the hands were put upon the man's chest. Or the higher part of a man's leg was given a blow, and then dust or a bit of wood was sent up in the direction of the sky. Such acts were equal to prayers.

(b) *Voiced Prayers*.—Some prayers are made up simply of a number of praise-names without any voiced requests. This form is frequently used when a group of people give worship to *mizimu*, but sometimes it is used for the worship of God: This is, as Chwana say, *kuboka*, a sort of praise given with the idea that when it comes to the ear of a *mizimu* or of God He will be pleased and will give in answer the things which the worshippers are in need of.

But generally men put their desires into words.

(3) *Times for Prayer*

When do the Africans say prayers? Some of them have every-day prayers; and others have only prayers for special times.

Here is an example of every-day prayer:

The Nandi people make frequent prayers to *Assista*, the Highest Being. This is a prayer such as a man will say twice a day, and it is specially said by old men in the early morning:

'*Assista*, in this way have I made my prayer to you. Keep watch over my children and my cattle. I have come near to you morning and evening. *Assista*, I have made my prayer to you while you were in sleep and while you went about. *Assista*, I have made my prayer to you. Do not now say, I am tired. O our spirits, keep watch over us who are living on the earth, and do not say: We were put to death by men.'

(4) *At Special Times*

At a time of marked change in a person's life prayers may be said for him.

When an Ashanti girl comes to the stage of full sex-development, and for the first time is in the condition of *bara* (as it is named by the Akan), the women have a meeting for song. The mother puts drops of wine upon the earth and says a prayer like this: '*Onyame, Nyankopon*, who is only great, upon whom men put their weight and by whom they are kept from falling, take this wine as a drink. Earth-goddess, whose day of worship is a Thursday, take this wine as a drink. The child whom God has given to me, to-day this *bara* condition has come upon her. O mother, who is living in the land of spirits, do not come and take her away; do not have let her come to be a woman only to go to her death.'

The Nandi have a feast four months after the birth of a child. An ox or a goat is put to death, and the mother and child and animal have milk put upon them by an old man of the tribe. Then the child's face is washed with the food from the animal's stomach and the old man makes a prayer like this:

*Assista*, make us healthy,  
*Assista*, keep us safe,  
 O our spirits, keep watch over this child!  
 O stomach, keep watch over this child!

When children are desired and the *musamo* of the *munganga* has given no help, and prayers to *mizimu* are of no effect, a woman may make her request to God. When, again, the time comes near for a woman to give birth, prayers may be said for her and the child.

For example, the husband of an Akan woman takes a fowl and after it is cut up one bit is cooked. The man then takes a leaf of a certain plant, with some salt, and puts it between his lips. With a blow of his breath he then puts them out and says: '*Onyame*, upon whom men put their weight and by whom they are kept from falling, O my *obosom*, let this child come out in peace.' He does this three times. Then he and his wife and children take a little of the cooked fowl which has been given as a blood-offering.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

Men and women go to God in times of greatest need. The Chwana have a story of an old woman who when there was no food in the town went out with some people to get roots. After a time the other people went on to get water and she was by herself. While she was working to get some of the roots ready for food, she kept saying prayers like this: *Modimo we, mme, u dihe hore diyo tse di nne le aona metse*—‘O God, my mother, make it so that this food may be with water in addition.’ Her people gave no more thought for her, because she was very old, but after some days they came across her again and to their surprise she was still living and well. She gave an account of what had taken place, saying that after her prayer she had no more need for water.

There is a prayer on record which was said by one of the Rolong in South Africa:

<i>Modimo oa borare,</i>	God of our fathers,
<i>Ke letse ke sa ya,</i>	I am stretched out with no food,
<i>Ke letse ka tlala,</i>	I am stretched out with a crying stomach.
<i>Ba bangue ba yele,</i>	Others have taken food,
<i>Ba letse ba khotse,</i>	They are stretched out full;
<i>Leha e le mocha,</i>	Even if it is but a polecat,
<i>Le sekomenyana,</i>	Or a little rock-rabbit,
<i>Nka itumela.</i>	I would be pleased with it.
<i>Ke bitsa Morimo,</i>	I say the name of God,
<i>Borara mogolo.</i>	Father of my fathers.

### (5) *Some Other Special Times*

There are times when all the people of a group say prayers to the Highest Being.

When the Nandi fighting men have gone to the wars, their mothers go out of their houses every morning, send water from their mouths out in the direction of the sun and say: ‘God, make us healthy.’ The fathers have meetings regularly and before taking a drink of beer they say a prayer like this: ‘God, keep watch over our children, so that we may again say “good day” to them.’ Then they let some drops of beer go on the the earth and on the walls of the house and say: ‘O our spirits, we make this prayer to you: See this beer and let us be healthy.’

Other special times for prayer are when seed is planted and when the grain is ready as food.

## AFRICANS AT PRAYER

When they have got in their grain the Nandi make food of meal and water from the first grain cut. All the family take some of the food and put it on the walls and roof of the house. They put a little in their mouths and with a blow of the breath send it out to the east. The head of the family takes some of the grain in his hand and says this prayer, every person present saying the words after him:

*Assista, make us healthy,  
And may we be given strength,  
And may we be given milk.*

If any man takes of this grain as food may it give him pleasure; If a woman about to give birth takes it, may she take pleasure in it.

When people put up houses they may make a request for a blessing from the *mizimu* upon them; and some people say prayers to the Highest Being at such a time.

Among the Nandi, milk and beer are put on the earth by the old men of the family and some salt is put into the hole made for the chief support of the house. Then they say:

*Assista, make us healthy,  
Assista, give us milk,  
Assista, give us power,  
Assista, give us grain,  
Assista, give us everything which is good,  
Assista, keep watch over our children and our cattle.*

Men and women who make things sometimes say a prayer for blessing upon their work. Nandi pot-makers put up this prayer: '*Assista, make us strong, so that when food is cooked by us in these pots men may have a taste for it.*'

### (6) *When People are Ill*

When a person is ill the general African way is to go to the *mungoma* (sign-reader) to see by what spirit he is troubled. If no other help is possible a prayer may be offered to God. At such a time the head of an Ila family takes a calabash full of water and meal and putting some on the earth on the right side of the door he says: '*Leza, I make this prayer. If it is you who has made our brother ill, let him be, so that your servant may go about by himself. Was it not you who made him and said*

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

he was to have the power of walking and to put his faith in you? *Mutalabala*, the Ever-living One, we make this prayer to you, you are the Great Chief!'

The Chagga, when prayers to the *mizimu* have no effect, take a goat when the sun is at its highest point. Keeping the goat in their hands and putting water from their mouth on its head they say: 'Here is the goat, *Ruwa*, my chief. You only have knowledge how you will do with this man as if you would let him come to birth again.' The goat is then put to death and its meat taken as food.

### (7) *When there is no Rain*

Even those Africans who do not regularly make prayers to God do so when rain does not come down at the right time. It is natural for them to do this, seeing that they have a belief that God has control over the forces of the sky.

Like possibly all Africans the Ila have a belief that men with the help of very strong medical substances (*musamo*) are able to get rain to come. But they make prayers to *Leza* in addition. The people come together and while smoke goes up from the burning *musamo* their cry goes up with it: *Tuendele umuyoba, Leza, kowa*—'Come to us with a rain which goes on day after day. O *Leza*, come down!'

From these examples it is clear that numbers of Africans do make prayers and even offerings to God, in addition to the prayers and offerings to *mizimu*. We see what the purpose is of these prayers; it is chiefly, almost completely, to make requests for things which God is able to give and men are in need of: that is to say, food and drink, strong bodies, help in time of trouble, increase of children and cattle. When offerings and prayers are made to *mizimu* these commonly go together; the one is not complete without the other. *Mizimu* are able to take as food the unseen part of the offerings, the taste, the smell, the spirit-substance, while the people take the meat. Most Africans would say that the Highest Being has no need for food, but some of them do make Him offerings of such things as they themselves take as food, goats and beer and milk. These at least, in their opinion, are pleasing to Him because they are a sign of the worshipper's good feeling.

## CHAPTER XV

### HOLY PLACES AND PERSONS

#### (1) *Holy Places*

NUMBERS of places are looked upon as holy by Africans because of their connection with the *mizimu*, the *orisha*, the *lubare*. There are spaces round the last resting-places of the dead and small houses which are put up there; places in the houses of men where offerings are made; trees and woods; altars put up in towns; shrines; and so on. These may be the living-places of the spirits, or places to which they come frequently. Over the greater part of Africa no such places are kept separate for the Highest Being, because He whose living-place is all space, and specially the sky, has no need for a place on earth. But some Africans have a belief that certain places on earth have a special connection with God and it is there men make their prayers and offerings to Him. Such places may be (a) made by men's hands, or (b) natural.

(a) We have seen before that everywhere in Ashanti there are altars to *Onyankopon* in the form of a forked branch cut from a certain tree named *Onyame dua*—‘God's tree.’ In addition there are, in out-of-the-way places, houses, or rooms in the houses of rulers, kept as temples of *Onyankopon*.

It was the custom of the people of Calabar to put up small round masses of earth upon which pots or basins were placed. A shrine of this sort was named *isu Abassi*—‘the face of God’; it was a sign to the people that *Abassi* was present among them.

(b) More frequently natural things are looked upon as holy. The Kikuyu, for example, give the name *mugumu* (or *muti*) *wa Engai* to the great fig-tree. No animal or bird might be put to death in such a tree and no branch might be cut off. Blood-offerings were made there. The Kamba give the name *ithembo* to such a holy place. The Konde keep holy a mass of trees on the slope of Mount Rungwe, an old fire-mountain, in which

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

*Kyala* is said to have his living-place. The Konde have as another holy place a great rock near Lake Nyasa. It is named Rock of *Kyala*. In it there is a hollow place named House of God. There the Konde chiefs came together to make prayers for rain. On the great mountain of Kilimanjaro there is another hollow named *Nyumba ya Mungu*—‘House of God.’ *Mwari* of the Kalanga is said to have a hollow in a mountain as his living-place.

Mountains themselves are frequently taken to be living-places of God. For example, a certain red burning mountain is named by the Masai *Ol-doinyo le'ng Ai*—‘the mountain of God.’ The Kamba and Kikuyu have the same thought about Mount Kenya.

### (2) *Holy Things*

It is common for Africans to have things which are looked upon with great respect because of some power which is in the things. The old arms which their fathers had, the axe or spear which a man makes use of to-day, may be holy in this way; a man may even say of his axe: ‘This is my *muzimu*.’ There are things to which the Ganda give the name *mayembe*. These are looked upon, not as *lubare* but as representatives of *lubare* and as having in them some of the quality or power of *lubare*. Offerings of cattle are made to the *mayembe* and the blood of offerings is put on them. In time of war certain *mayembe* were taken with the army and in this form the war *lubare*, named *Zoba*, was present with them to give help. If, said the Ganda, you have the *mayembe* you have the *lubare* and you have his power. The Ganda keep the bones of their kings for a like reason. As we will see in another place, there are people who have the belief that holy things of God have in them some of the power of God.

### (3) *Holy Animals*

Numbers of Africans have a belief that *mizimu* and gods are able to come to them in the form of animals such as snakes and lions; or even that the *mizimu* have taken up their living-place in those animals. A cow, or the young of a cow, may sometimes be looked upon in the same way and even be said to be a god. For example, the wife of a Venda chief said of a baby ox:

## HOLY PLACES AND PERSONS

‘That is my god. With him I get up in the morning and go to rest in the evening; in the day he is with me in the field and gives me everything I have need for.’ Some people have had the belief, it seems, that the Highest Being of all may come to men in the form of an animal; but this is not true of the Africans generally.

### (4) *Holy Days*

Some Africans keep holy certain days. The Ila, for example, do no work for two or three days after the fall of the first rains. This is an act of respect for *Leza* from whom the rain has come.

The Akan of Ashanti keep Thursdays holy for Mother Earth. The farmer does no ploughing on that day. In old times a man who did not keep this rule was put to death. Saturday is *Nyankopon*’s holy day in Ashanti.

### (5) *Holy Persons*

It is not uncommon in Africa to see men and women who are looked upon as representatives in the flesh of unseen spirits. They are the go-betweens, acting for the gods on one side and for men on the other.

In Uganda, for example, every *lubare* had his house or holy place, and one or more *kabona*—‘priest.’ This priest’s work was to keep the holy place in good order, to see that the fire was burning day and night, and to take from the people the offerings which they came with for the *lubare*. The *kabona* was holy: anybody who did him wrong might be put to death. The vessels in the holy place were holy: no man who was not a priest might put a hand on them. There were, in addition, persons named *mandwa* through whose mouths the *lubare* said things to the people. These were men or women. The selection of them was made by the *lubare* themselves. That is to say, if a man suddenly said things without being conscious of what he was saying, things about the future, things which were secret, the people saw that it was a *lubare* who was using his tongue. The strange words which were voiced by him were then made clear to the people by the *kabona*. Female *mandwa* had to keep separate from men because they were looked upon as wives of the *lubare*. A number of young girls were taken as servants of

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

the *lubare*; they kept watch over the fire in the holy place and got the wood and water. They might not have anything to do with men while they were servants of the *lubare*.

In Ashanti there were *akomfo*, 'priests' separate for life to the work of *Nyame*, the Highest God. They had such names as *Nyame boa me*—'God give me help'; *Fa ma Nyame*—'Take it and give to God'; *Nyame asem*—'God's word'; *Nyame adom*—'God's approval.' They had a special dress and special ornaments marking their important position. It is they who made ready the offerings of sheep and other things which were given to *Nyame*.

## LOOKING BACK

LET us take a look now at the road by which we have come so far.

We saw, at the start, that Africans, like other people, are conscious of the existence of a Power. They are moved to wonder and fear by its working and by the effects of its working. They see it chiefly in the rain, the thunder, the sun, and in other great natural facts. They see it in some of the events of their life. For this Power Africans have numbers of names. Some say it is *Leza*, others *Mulungu*, others *Nyambe*. Africans are not all certain that the Power is a person, as men are persons. They are not all certain that the Power is one, and only one. It is a general belief that there is distribution of power among a number of unseen beings. Some say there is one Highest Power who has given authority and strength to lesser beings such as the *orisha*, *lubare* and *mizimu*. Of what that Power is in Himself Africans are not at all certain. But it is a general belief that He is at a great distance from themselves. At one time in the past, some say, He was living among men, but later He went far away. He may be kind and good but on this point they have no certain knowledge. The things He gives, such as rain and food, seem to say that He is good and kind, but doubts come because of the pain and disease and death which, in addition, seem to be caused by Him. That He is the Great Maker of nations is clear to most Africans, but that all men are responsible to Him for all their acts and thoughts is not so clear. It comes as surprising news to them that He has a desire for good hearts in men. It is even more strange to them that God gives help to be good and is a saviour from sin.

Africans have a belief in prayer. Not all of them make prayers to God Himself; frequently it is only to lesser beings—the *orisha*, *lubare* and *mizimu*—that they go in time of need. They give offerings to these beings and only infrequently to God.

The religion of Africans seems to be full of question-marks. There are such a number of things they are not certain about.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE AFRICANS

They are like men walking in a half-light. What light they have is, in part, a true light but it is not enough.

We are now to take another step. We are to have a look at another people—a people who have a very long history. Let us make comparisons between them and Africans. Let us put the same questions about them as we have put about the Africans. Let us see if their experience gives us any help in getting the knowledge of God for which Africans have need. We will see that they, like Africans, went far on the road but did not get into the full light.

PART II

BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### (1) *How Jews are Different from Africans*

WE have now to give our minds to the question: What revelation of God came to the Jews? But before answering this question it is necessary to put another: In what ways are Jews different from the Africans?

(1) The Africans are made up of a great number of tribes. In view of their wide distribution, the number of their languages, and their different history and experience, it is not surprising that there is not complete agreement among them in their ideas of God. The Jews were at first made up of a small number of tribes, with a common language, and they became united into one nation living together in a little country. Because of this it will not be so hard to say what, at any one time, was their belief.

(2) A more important fact is that the Jews have a recorded history and the Africans have not. Before the coming of the Arabs and the Europeans the Africans had no books. They had stories handed down from old times, and certain tribes are able to give the names of their kings for hundreds of years back. But such stories are not enough to make us certain about the past. It is not possible to put together from them a clear account of the development of belief. But the Jews had books: some of the books which are in the Bible were first put into writing seven hundred years before our Lord Jesus Christ came. In some of the books there are stories which were handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth a very long time before they were recorded in writing. From these writings we are able to see that the belief of the Jews was not the same at all times. There were changes in it: there was development. No doubt there has been development in the belief of Africans through thousands of years, but we are not able to give an account of it because there are no records in writing.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

### (2) *There is Development of Ideas in the Old Testament*

We have to keep in mind that the books of the Bible are not put together in order of time. Genesis, which gives us the story of how things came into being and the story of the fathers of the Jews, is not the earliest of the books. Some of the books which were first put in writing come near the end of the Old Testament —Amos and Hosea, for example. And some of the books as we have them now are formed of parts which were put into writing at different times by different men in different places. The writers by whom the parts were joined together are given the name 'Editor.' Frequently they put side by side two old stories which are different in details, the one from the other. For these reasons it is sometimes hard to give a straightforward account of the development of belief among the Jews. But we are able to see that there was development. The belief of the Jews in God became fuller, stronger, truer, with the flight of years. Moses, who was living more than a thousand years before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, had much knowledge of God; but Amos and Isaiah and Jeremiah had more than Moses.

### (3) *The Teachers of the Jews*

Out of experience comes knowledge. Very frequently it is from the hard experiences of life that we get greater and clearer knowledge. This is true of persons and of nations. If only our knowledge of the history of the Africans was more certain we would be able to say the names of their great teachers and what their teaching was. No doubt there were men who were conscious that God was at work in the great events of their time. But we have no certain record of them. The Jews had experience of war and trouble, of journeying from land to land, of the cruel rule of other nations, and of salvation from the hands of those by whom they were hated. And there were great teachers among the Jews who saw the reason of these events because their minds were given light by God. These events, they said, do not come about by chance: they come as part of the purpose of God, the King and Ruler of nations. It is because these men saw this so clearly and said it with so much power that they became the great teachers of the Jews

## INTRODUCTION

and of all nations. God put His Spirit into these men and to the limit of their power they gave to others knowledge of His design and of the ways of living which were pleasing to Him. If, then, we are to see rightly how knowledge of God was increasing and becoming more certain as the years went past, it is necessary to give special attention to these great men.

The first to have our attention is Moses.

## CHAPTER II

### MOSES AND HIS WORK

#### (1) *The Revelation of God to Moses*

IN the time of Moses the Jews were living a hard life in Egypt. The story in Exodus says that Moses was taken into the house of the king of Egypt's daughter and he became her son. When he was a man he got into trouble and had to go out of the country. He went into the land of Midian where he was married to a daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian. While he was taking care of his father-in-law's sheep he came one day to Horeb, the mountain of God. And there God came to him in the heart of a fire and said: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. . . . I have seen the trouble of My people who are in Egypt and I have given ear to their cry because of their hard masters. And I have come down to take them out of the hand of the Egyptians. . . . Come now and I will send you to Pharaoh so that you may take My people out of Egypt.'<sup>1</sup>

Moses did what he was ordered to do. He went to the king of Egypt, but the king would not let the Jews go out of his land. God put fear into his heart by sending great troubles upon his people and at last he let them go. Changing his mind, however, he sent an army to make an attack upon them; but God took them by the hand and the Egyptians were overtaken by destruction.

From this very old story we may see clearly what were the ideas of the Jews in those days about God. They were certain of His existence; that He was able and ready to give ear to the cry of men; and that His voice came to men. His living-place was in the mountain of Sinai (Horeb)<sup>2</sup> and He came down to the help of His people. He sent destruction and death upon those who would not do what He said. And the special revelation which came to Moses was that God had a name as men

<sup>1</sup> Exodus iii. 6-10.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy xxxiii. 2.

## MOSES AND HIS WORK

have names. God said to Moses: 'You will say this to the Jews: Yahwe,<sup>1</sup> the God of your fathers, has sent me to you; this is my name for ever.' We will come back to this very important point. At present it is enough to say that the sense of this name is that God is living and is the saviour of His people.

### (2) *The Berith between Yahwe and the Jews*

The Jews came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There they saw something which put fear into their hearts. The old writing says: 'The mountain was all smoking, because Yahwe came down upon it in fire: and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a fireplace, and all the mountain was shaking.'<sup>2</sup> And at that mountain there was made a Berith, an agreement (an *Agano*, as the Swahili say), by which Yahwe became the God of the Jews and they became His people. Moses put up an altar. Oxen were put to death as an offering to Yahwe. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half he put on the altar. Then he said over again the words which Yahwe had said to him on the mountain and the Jews made answer: 'Everything Yahwe has said we will do and give ear to.' Then Moses took the blood which was in the basins and put it on the bodies of the people and said: 'See, this is the blood of the Berith which Yahwe has made with you on all these conditions.'

An agreement such as this is not a strange thing to Africans: they frequently make agreements like it themselves. This was an agreement, however, not between men and men, but between God and men. The blood made a connection between them; from that time they were united as one. Yahwe became the God of the Jews, their Guide, their Helper, their Saviour. By taking them out of Egypt He had given them a sign of His love. As His people they were dependent upon Him, and now, and for all future time, the right behaviour for them was clear enough: they were at all times to do what they were ordered to do by Him.

Among the conditions of the agreement were the laws which are named The Ten Words:

<sup>1</sup> Yahwe is the same as Jehovah.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus xix. 18.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

- (1) You are to have no other gods by the side of Me.
- (2) You are not to make images for worship.
- (3) You are not to make use of Yahwe's name without thought.
- (4) You are to keep the Sabbath day holy.
- (5) You are to do honour to your father and mother.
- (6) You are to do no *murder*; that is to say, you are not to put people to death against the law.
- (7) Let there be no broken faith between husband and wife.
- (8) You are not to take another person's property.
- (9) You are not to make false statements about other people.
- (10) You are not to have desire for another person's things.

### *(3) The Place of the Berith in the Life of the Jews*

It is in this Berith that we see the special quality of the religion of the Jews. Other peoples have had a belief that they came from God in a physical sense: they are of God's family because their first father was, as they say, a son of God. But the belief of the Jews was different. Among all the nations Yahwe Himself had made a selection of them, taking them as His special people. The gods of other nations did not make it a rule that their people had to be good. But Yahwe was a God of righteousness and was at all times looking for right-doing in His people. When years went by they came to have a clearer knowledge of what is good in God's eyes. With the Berith they made a good start. In all the years to come they were never able to put it out of their minds: the thought of it was at all times a strong force in their life. When Jeremiah, as we will see later, said that Yahwe would some day make a new Berith with His people, this first Berith was still in his mind.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BELIEF OF THE JEWS BEFORE MOSES

#### (1) *Knowledge of God but not of His Name Yahwe*

ARE we to say, then, that up to the time of Moses the Jews had no knowledge of Yahwe and did not give Him worship? One of the old writings has it that the worship of Yahwe goes back very far, even to Enoch the son of Adam's son, and that Yahwe gave knowledge of Himself to Abraham, Jacob, and others among the fathers. But in another old record it is said that when Yahwe first came to Moses His words were: 'I am Yahwe; and I came to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but as to My name Yahwe they had no knowledge of Me.'<sup>1</sup> This is probably a true statement of the position. That is to say, Abraham and the other fathers had knowledge of God but not of His name Yahwe; this revelation came to the Jews through Moses.

#### (2) *The Old Word El*

If this is so, what word was used for 'God' by the fathers of the Jews? The oldest word is El. We are not certain of its sense; possibly it is equal to 'The One who is strong,' or 'He who is first.' Frequently another word was put with it: *El Shaddai*—'The God of all power'; *El Rahum*—'The God of pity'; *El Hai*—'The living God'; *El Elyon*—'God most high'; *El Olam*—'The Eternal God.'

Africans make names for their children out of the name of God. The Nyaruanda, for example, have these names: *Hakiz' Imana*—'God gives strength'; *Nsab' Imana*—'I make a prayer to God.' The Chwana in the same way make names like these for girls: *Secwamodimong*—'She comes from God'; *Samodimo*—'She is God's property'; or, in place of *Modimo* they put the

<sup>1</sup> Exodus vi. 2, 3.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

pronoun<sup>1</sup> *o* or *ona*: *Goitseona*—‘He’ (i.e. God) ‘has knowledge’; *Oabile*—‘He has given.’ In the same way the Jews made names such as: *Ishma-el*—‘God gives ear’; *El-dad*—‘God has love’; *El-zabad*—‘God has given’; *El-iab*—‘God is father.’

Africans say *untu*—‘one person,’ *bantu*—‘more than one person,’ but they do not say *Leza*, *ba-Leza*, as if there is more than one *Leza*. But the fathers of the Jews put the word *El* into the plural<sup>2</sup> form, *elim*. Their belief was that there are numbers of *elim*, in the same way that some Africans say there are numbers of *lubare* or *orisha*. Even when Moses had given the Jews clearer knowledge of *Yahwe* they still kept the belief in *elim* for a long time and they simply put *Yahwe* over them all. *Yahwe*, they said, is *El of Elim*, the greatest of the *elim*. There are these words in a very old song: ‘Who is like you, O *Yahwe*, among the *elim*?’ The time came when the Jews were quite certain that there is only one God over all the earth, and then they said the *elim*, to which other people still gave worship, were *shelim*, i.e. spirit-beings lower than God; they said they were ‘breath,’ unimportant things of no value.

### (3) *The Word Elohim*

The fact to be noted first is that *Elohim*, like *Elim*, is plural in form. Sometimes it is used in the Bible as the name of the one great God; but, specially in the oldest writings, it is used of other beings in addition.

(a) When Jacob was about to go from Shechem to Bethel he said to the people of his house: ‘Put away the strange *elohim* which are among you,’ and they gave him all the strange *elohim* which were in their hand, and the rings which were in their ears.<sup>3</sup> These *elohim* seem to have been images (like the *nkishi* of some Africans) and the ear-rings seem to have been a sort of *suman* in which Jacob’s people put their faith.

(b) The story goes on to say that Jacob went to Bethel and there put up an altar for the worship of the true God, *El*. Jacob had been in that place before this. He came there one day when the sun was down and he took one of the stones of

<sup>1</sup> *Pronoun*: a word which is used in the place of a name.

<sup>2</sup> *Plural*: the form for more than one, e.g. persons, *bantu*.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis xxxv. 2, 4.

## THE BELIEF OF THE JEWS BEFORE MOSES

the place and put it under his head and went to sleep. In his sleep he saw angels of God going up to heaven and coming down; and God's voice came to his ears. In the morning when he was awake he had a feeling of fear, and he said: 'This place is the house of Elohim.' He took the stone which was under his head and put it up as a pillar; and he gave that place the name Beth-El, which is to say, 'The House of God.'<sup>1</sup> Here we see that Elohim and-El are the same.

(c) But in old times the name Elohim was not only given to the Highest Being who made all things; it was given to men of important position. The chiefs of the nation were said to be Elohim. The old Law was that when the time came to let a *slave*<sup>2</sup> go free and if the slave said: 'I have love in my heart for my master, for my wife and my offspring, I will not go away free,' then the master was to take him before the Elohim and make a hole in the slave's ear and the slave was to be his property for ever.<sup>3</sup> Here, as in other parts of the old writings, the chiefs or judges were named Elohim because their voice was taken to be the voice of God and people went in fear of them. In much the same way an African may say to his chief, or to a great white man, *Modimo oaka*—'My God,' because he has more power than others.

(d) In addition the Jews gave the name Elohim to the spirits of dead men. Even long after the time of Moses, when men had a greater knowledge of God, King Saul sent his servants in search of a woman who had to do with spirits. He went to her with the request that she would make Samuel come up from the land of the dead. When she saw Samuel she said to Saul: 'I see Elohim coming up out of the earth.'<sup>4</sup>

Now it is clear from these examples taken from the old writings that there was a time when the Jews had no certain knowledge that there is only one God. They were conscious of strange powers working in things and in men, but they had no feeling that all power was in one God and came from Him only. In this way they were like numbers of Africans to-day. The time came when the Jews had no doubt at all that there is one God over all things. Even then they kept the old word, Elohim.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis xxviii. 10-19.

<sup>2</sup> *Slave*, a servant who is the property of his or her master.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus xxi. 2-6.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel xxviii. 7-14.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

If it seems strange that the word Elohim, which has the sense of more than one El, was used of the great Being who is by Himself in glory and power, let us keep in mind that Africans frequently make use of a word in the same way. A man says, for example, *Bama*—‘my mothers’ when his thought is of one woman only. This is a way of doing honour to a person. The word El, we may say, gives the sense of a Being of great power; Elohim gives the sense of a Being whose power is so great as to be outside the range of man’s thought.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NEW RELATION OF THE JEWS TO GOD

#### (1) *What is in a Name?*

NOW the revelation which came to Moses was that Elohim had a name and that the name was Yahwe. Elohim was not at first a name, just as Mulungu is not a name; but Yahwe is a true name of a Being who is a person.

Africans are able to see the sense of this great revelation better possibly than Europeans. As among Africans, so among the Jews, a name is not a ticket for marking off one person from another. It is a pointer to what a person is in himself; and more—it is part of the person. When boys have gone through the *initiation ceremonies*<sup>1</sup> they are given new names, because they themselves are new. So Jews got new names after important events in their experience: Abram became Abraham; Jacob became Israel. Africans *bonga* a chief by crying his names and these names make clear the idea which the people have of him; and there will be a new *isibongo* when some new quality in the chief is noted by reason of something he has done.

Even so the names which men give to God put into words the ideas which men have of Him. When a new revelation comes to men of qualities in God, of which they had no knowledge up to that time, they may get a new name for Him. So the Jews were given the name of Yahwe. The voice of God came to the ears of Moses: 'I am Yahwe. I came to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but as to My name, Yahwe, they had no knowledge of Me.'

#### (2) *The Name Yahwe*

What, then, was the sense of the name Yahwe? One of the old writers says that Elohim said to Moses: "'Ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh.'

<sup>1</sup> The special acts which give boys the position of men in society.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus iii. 14.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

It is hard to say what is the sense of these Hebrew words. The sense may be 'I am what I am,' 'I am that which I am now and have been at all times,' or 'I will be what I will be.' Moses put this question: 'When I come to the Jews and say to them, "The Elohim of your fathers has sent me to you," and they say to me, "What is His name?" what am I to say to them?' And God's answer was: '*Eyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*'; and in addition He said: 'You will say this to the Jews, "*Ehyeh* ('I will be') has sent me to you.'" When God is talking of Himself He says '*Ehyeh*'—'I will be'; when others are talking of Him they say *Yahwe*—'He will be.' This name is full of suggestion. When the Jews said 'Elohim' their thought was of what God was in Himself: when they said 'Yahwe' their thought was of what He was and will be in relation to themselves. Of what He will be to His people in the future they have now little knowledge: He will at all times be more than they are able to say; as time goes by they will more and more get knowledge of Him through what He does. Yahwe is Elohim taking away the cover from His face. No words are able to say all He will be in future; but He will be One in whom they will be able to put their faith at all times. His mercy, which is unchanging, will at all times be with them and be seen in His guiding hand. The name Yahwe, in other words, has this sense: 'I will be your saviour in the way in which I will be your saviour.'

### (3) *The Jews in the Waste Lands*

The salvation of which they first had experience was salvation from Egypt. Then for forty years they were a wandering people in the waste lands between Egypt and Canaan. Their way of living was like that of the Bedouin in those lands to-day. They had no houses and towns, but only tents which they put up at night. They had no ploughed fields. The only property they had was cows and oxen and sheep, and with these they went about from place to place looking for water and grass. The organization of their society was of the simplest sort. Moses was their chief and he was helped by a body of old men as judges. All the men were trained for fighting and frequently took up arms against other wandering tribes.

What kept the Jews together in the waste-lands was their

## THE NEW RELATION OF THE JEWS TO GOD

faith in Yahwe and their great chief, Moses. It was their belief that Yahwe had His living-place on Horeb, the mountain of God; but they were certain that He went with them in their journeying. He had given His word to this effect before they went out of Egypt. He said that His 'face,' His 'angel,' would be present with them at all times, and this was equal to saying that He Himself would be among them.

### (4) *The Signs of Yahwe's 'Face.'*

Men are in need of something to make them conscious of God's 'face'; they may not keep Him in mind if they have not a sign which they are able to see. The Jews were given such signs. It is said: 'Yahwe went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to make their way clear, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light; that they might go by day and by night.'<sup>1</sup> In addition to this there was the *mikdash* (holy place) which Yahwe gave orders to be made for Him so that He might have a place among the Jews. The Tabernacle, as the *mikdash* is named, was simply a great tent which it was possible to take to bits and put together again. Moses, it is said, had it put up far from the tents of the people; he gave it the name Tent of Meeting. All persons who had the desire for a talk with God went out to the Tent. Moses went inside, it is said, and had talks with Yahwe as a man has with his friend.

Inside the Tent of Meeting was placed the 'Ark,' which was simply a box. Inside it were the two stones on which the Ten Words of the Berith were cut. The belief of the Jews was that the 'face' itself of Yahwe was there, in and about the Ark. When the men went to war the Ark was taken with them so that they might have the help of Yahwe in the fight. It was a holy thing; to put a hand upon it was death.

By this teaching of the eyes the Jews were made conscious that their God was no longer at a great distance from them; He was near; He was among them as their Helper.

<sup>1</sup> Exodus xiii. 21.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WORSHIP WHICH THE JEWS GAVE TO YAHWE

#### (1) *The Old and the New*

WE may say that a new religion was started by Moses. When he came to the Jews with a new revelation of God, new ways of worship naturally came into being. But at all times when people take up a new religion they do not completely give up the old; they keep some of the ideas and forms of worship which were handed down from older days. Even if names and forms are changed some of the old ideas are still in the minds of the people. There was something which was quite new in the religion started by Moses—a new idea of God—but we have no need to be surprised if we come upon signs of the older faith.

#### (2) *Holy Places: Offerings*

Before Moses there were numbers of holy places: holy trees, fountains and stones, all of them being holy because they were the living-places of different Elim. Now, under the teaching of Moses, there was, for the Jews, only one holy place, the Ark in the Tent of Meeting; and there was only one El, who was Yahwe. Their belief was, it is true, that the Elim were still in existence and that every nation had its El, even as the people of Moab had their Chemosh and the Jews had their Yahwe. They were still without knowledge that Yahwe was God over all the earth: that belief came to them later. But they were certain that Yahwe, their El, was greater than all others.

The chief act of worship in the very old days was the offering which was named *Zebach*, which is to say ‘Putting to death.’ There were two parts of it. First the blood of an animal was put upon, or at the base of, a *massebah*, a stone pillar. Then the meat of the animal was taken as food by the worshippers together: the belief was that the El took it at the same time,

## THE WORSHIP OF YAHWE BY JEWS

so that the meal was one which the El and His people had in common. There were two ideas at the back of this offering: there was the giving of a life to God, the blood of the animal being its life; and there was the uniting of God and people through the taking of holy food together. These ideas are not strange to Africans; some of the things they do are based on the same ideas. The Jews kept on making offerings of this sort, but gave them to Yahwe and to Yahwe only—not to Elim.

### (3) *The Priests*

It seems certain that it was quite a new thing for the Jews to have an order of priests. In the older days every man was a priest for himself: that is to say, he made offerings to the Elim for himself, or if he was the head of a house he made them for his family. For the new religion it was necessary to have special men for the work, men who had been trained to make the offerings to Yahwe in the right way, to take care of the Ark and Tent of Meeting, and to have the power of reading the desires of Yahwe through signs. So one of the divisions of the Jews—the Levites—was given the special position of priests.

Africans have their ways of *kusonda*,<sup>1</sup> that is to say, of reading signs. The Jews had a sort of *shisondo* by which they got knowledge of the desires of Yahwe and of other uncertain things. When, in later times, King David, it is said, put a question to Yahwe, 'Am I to go to make war on the Philistines?' and Yahwe gave the answer 'Go,'<sup>2</sup> the answer came through the *shisondo*. They were named Urim and Tummim, but we have no detailed knowledge of what these things were. They were kept by the priests; and in some way they gave the answer 'Yes' or 'No' to the questions which were put through the priests.

The use of Urim and Tummim seems to have come to an end after the time of King David. With clearer knowledge of Yahwe all sorts of sign-reading were put away.

### (4) *Feasts*

The Feasts of the Jews were part of the worship given to

<sup>1</sup> *Kusonda* is the Ila word for sign-reading; a sign-reader (diviner) is *musonzhi*; and the instruments which he makes use of are *shisondo*.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel xxiii. 2.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

Yahwe. Some of these were very old. The old feast named Pesach seems at first to have had a connection with the offering to the Elim, year by year, of the first offspring of their animals. It came to be a very special feast once a year in memory of Yahwe's mercy in taking the Jews out of the power of Egypt. Another old feast was the Feast of the New Moon, which was now kept in honour of Yahwe. Probably it had been their way for a long time to keep free from work on one day every month, or on every seventh day: the day was *tonda*—‘taboo.’<sup>1</sup> Now by the law of Yahwe the Jews made one day in the week, the Sabbath, a holy day.

These are examples of the changes which came in with Moses. We may be certain that some of the people had no love for the new religion with its new laws; in our reading of Exodus and Numbers we see how they frequently made protests and went back to older ways. From the high viewpoint of the Christian faith it is clear that there were errors in their thoughts and acts. But we see a people at school, being trained for better things. In other words, we may say that Moses put a seed from God into the heart of the Jews which was to give much fruit in later years.

<sup>1</sup> Taboo. All African languages have words for this idea. *Tonda* is the Ila word: in other languages it is ‘zila,’ ‘yila,’ etc.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE JEWS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN

(1) *What took place in Canaan?*

THE long time of wandering in waste lands came to an end and the Jews, with Joshua at their head (because Moses was dead), went into the land of Canaan and took it by force. Their way of life underwent great changes and there were important developments in their religion. If we are to make those developments clear to ourselves we have to put the question first: What were the changes in the way of living?

The Jews were made strong by their belief that Yahwe was on their side in the war against the Canaanites. There is an old war-song in the book of Judges<sup>1</sup> which puts this view clearly. Deborah, who was the Judge of Israel at that time, made the song. At the start of it she says that Yahwe came like an armed man from Sinai in the far south.

I will make a song to Yahwe,  
I will make music for Yahwe, the Elohim of Israel.  
Yahwe, in your journey from Seir,  
In your walk from the field of Edom,  
Earth was shocked, heaven moved from side to side;  
Yes, the clouds sent down water,  
The mountains were shaking before Yahwe,  
Before the face of Yahwe, the Elohim of Israel.

It seems that when this fight was going on there was a sudden outburst of thunder and rain, the river became full and the Canaanites were taken away by it. The Jews saw in this event the act of Yahwe. The end of the song is:

So may all who are against you, O Yahwe, come to an end,  
But may your worshippers be like the sun coming out in its power.

In another old song it is said:

<sup>1</sup> Judges v.  
99

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

Yahwe is a man of war,  
Yahwe is His name.

Very cruel things were done in that war against the Canaanites. Sometimes a town was taken and every person in it was put to death. The belief of the Jews was that they were doing what Yahwe had given them orders to do.

The story of Jephthah and his daughter lets us see how strange were the views of some of the Jews about God. Jephthah was one of the chiefs and he went to war against the Ammonites. Before starting he gave his word to Yahwe, saying: 'If Yahwe will put the Ammonites into my hand, then when I come back in peace whatever comes to me first out of the doors of my house will be Yahwe's and I will give it as a burned offering.' He went into the fight with his men and overcame the Ammonites. When he got back, his daughter came out, dancing and playing music in joy. She was his only daughter. When Jephthah saw her he said: 'Alas! my daughter, you are the cause of much grief to me because I have given my word to Yahwe and I am unable to take it back.' And so because of what he had said to Yahwe he put her to death and made a burned offering of her body.

Now we who have the teaching of the Lord Jesus about the love of the Father in heaven are not able to say that such a God as this, 'a man of war,' to whom a man gives his daughter as a burned offering, is the true God. They were in error. God is not like that.

### *(2) Two Nations Become United*

The Jews were stronger than the Canaanites in war. They were united by a strong faith in Yahwe, while the Canaanites had no such uniting force. Under their great captain, Joshua, the Jews took much of the land, specially in the highlands, while the Canaanites kept the lowlands and most of the towns in that part. In time the two nations became good friends. A very serious danger came upon them. A strong nation, Philistines by name, made attacks on them. In face of the common danger they gave help to one another and went into the fight side by side against the Philistines. At times the tribes of the Jews had made war one against another, but they were united against the common danger. It became necessary to

## THE JEWS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN

have one captain of the armies, and so it came about that the Jews got a king who became king of the two nations, and they were united under him as one people.

The first king was Saul, who came to his end fighting the Philistines. After his death the Philistines seemed to be in control of almost all the country, but David, the greatest of the kings, overcame them after some hard fights. He took Jerusalem, a strong military place, from the Jebusites, who had kept it all through this time, and he made it the seat of government. By war after war the limits of his kingdom were pushed out in all directions and his power became very great. His son, Solomon, made the kingdom even greater. But under Solomon's son, Rehoboam, there was trouble and the kingdom was broken into two: Judah in the south, and Israel in the north. There were a number of kings after this time; we have their story in the two books of Kings.

## CHAPTER VII

# THE OUTCOME OF THE UNITING OF THE JEWS WITH THE CANAANITES

### (1) *Cattle-keepers and Farmers*

IT is now time for us to give thought to the religion of the Jews in the five hundred years separating Joshua from Elijah. It is a long time: longer than, say, our day is from the coming of the Hima into the countries of Victoria Nyanza, and the coming of the Bantu into South Africa. There is time for change and growth in five hundred years.

The thing to keep in mind is that the Jews had been wanderers in the waste lands and that when they went into Palestine<sup>1</sup> they were among people who were at a much higher stage of development. The Jews were keepers of cows; they were living in tents. The Canaanites had great towns with stone walls round them, and fields planted with grain and fruit trees. The existence of farmers is at all times more complex than that of wandering cow-keepers. What will take place when they become mixed? We may see examples in Africa. When the Hima came into Uganda they, like the Jews, were cow-keepers; the Bantu who were there in the country before them were farmers, like the Canaanites. These two peoples had an effect on one another's thought and way of living, one taking from the other what it did not have before. They gave one another a push forward so that as a nation formed of two peoples they got to a higher stage of development than they had got to separately. It was like this with the Jews and the Canaanites.

We may make a picture in our minds of the surprise with which the simple new-comes from the waste lands saw signs of the well-being of the Canaanites: their great towns, good food and clothing, and fertile lands. No doubt they quickly got a desire for these things. The only way to get them was by learning from the Canaanites, and so when the wars came to

<sup>1</sup> Palestine is the name we now give to the land of Canaan.

## THE JEWS AND CANAANITES UNITED

an end we may be certain that the Jews took over from the Canaanites the arts of ploughing and building.

But there was much more than this in the process. Among these peoples of the old days, as among Africans to-day, religion had a place in every part of their life. The farmer is certain that the fields will not give their produce without the help of unseen beings. Africans were conscious that when they took land from another tribe it was necessary to see that *mizimu* of that tribe were pleased, because the land and the rivers were the property of the *mizimu*, and without their approval there would be no grain and no fish, but only trouble. So they took steps to take over those *mizimu* for themselves, or they got some of the earlier owners to make prayers and offerings for them to the *mizimu*. For example, every year the Venda of the Transvaal make an offering of beer at a place named Badzimon ('at the gods'); of the two priests who make the offering and put up prayers for the well-being of the tribe, one is of the Ngona who were the first owners of the country.

In the same way the Jews had the belief that the help of the gods of the Canaanites was necessary if their fields were to do well. Not till numbers of years had gone by did they become certain that Yahwe was able to give them grain and wine and oil. Was not Yahwe a mountain El? How was He to have knowledge of farming? They came in much later years to be certain that their knowledge of ploughing, of putting in seed, and of getting in the grain was all given by Yahwe (Isaiah xxviii. 23-29). But even in the days of the prophet Hosea (over five hundred years after the Jews went into Canaan), some of the people were unconscious that Yahwe gave them their grain and wine and oil. When they first came into Canaan it seemed natural to look to the gods of the land for these things.

### (2) *The Gods of the Canaanites*

In some ways the gods of the Canaanites were like the Elim of the fathers of the Jews. They were named Baalim, which is to say 'Owners.' Their numbers were great. Every place had its special Baal. It was the king, the father, the war-captain, the keeper, of the people who were living in the place. They

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

were specially the gods of ploughlands and their business was to make the lands fertile. If they were not kept in a good humour there would be no rain, no corn.

That the Baal was present in a place was made clear by material things: natural stones in an upright position and pillars of wood. In addition there were holy places made of stone and earth. These were placed generally on the top of hills and so were named Bamoth, 'high places.'

The Baalim were kept in a good humour by offerings and feasts. At the time when one year came to an end and another was started, there was a great feast; and there was another feast in spring when a start was made to get in the grain. Later on, when all the grain was got in, another great feast was made as a sign of their joy. The first offspring of every animal was given to the Baal and a tenth part of the grain and the first-fruits. There were priests of Baal whose business it was to keep the holy places in good order and the fires burning for burned-offerings, to give teaching about the right ways of worship, and to make discovery of the Baal's desires by sign-reading.

### (3) *Yahwe and the Baalim*

The Jews and the Canaanites were of the same blood; their languages were of the same family. The Jews took over the language of the Canaanites and their way of life. And there was great danger that they would take their religion in addition. This was made more probable because of the points of agreement between the two religions. The Jews did take over much of the forms of worship. That they did not take over everything is to the credit chiefly of the great prophets about whom we will say much in other parts of this book.

In the book of Judges it is said that after the death of Joshua 'the Jews did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahwe and gave their worship to the Baalim; and they went from Yahwe, the Elohim of their fathers, who took them out of the land of Egypt, and went after other gods, the gods of the peoples which were round about them. . . .'<sup>1</sup> The writer had the belief that Yahwe was the one and only God and that to give worship

<sup>1</sup> Judges ii. 11, 12.

## THE JEWS AND CANAANITES UNITED

to the Baalim was very wrong. Again and again he made use of such words in his book. We may be certain that not all the Jews went after the Baalim; all the time there were a number who kept true to the old faith. But most of them had a place in their hearts for Yahwe and Baalim together: Yahwe was their helper in war; the Baalim were their helpers in everything which had to do with the land. This joining together of two unequal things—of the true with the false—had to come to an end some time, and the end was that Yahwe was seen to be the only God.

The story of the long fight between these ideas of Yahwe and Baalim is in some of the books of the Bible. There is, for example, the story of Gideon, one of the greatest of the Judges, a man in whose heart love for Yahwe was burning like a fire. His father had an altar for the worship of Baal and by the side of it was the Asherah, or holy pillar of wood. In the night the voice of Yahwe came to Gideon that he was to take away these things and put up in their place an altar for Yahwe and make a burned-offering to Him upon it. Through fear of his family and the men of the town, Gideon had to do this secretly by night. In the morning the men saw the altar of Baal broken down and the Asherah cut down; they were very angry and had a strong desire to put Gideon to death because of what he had done. But his father would not let them do so; 'If Baal is a god,' he said, 'let him take care of himself.' Because Gideon was not then taken by death, we may be certain that Baal's authority over the men became less. No doubt there were numbers of Jews who had the same burning love for Yahwe as Gideon had.

This sort of war of the mind went on for a great number of years. In the end the Jews became certain that Yahwe, and not the Baalim, was the God of the land of Canaan. They did not come to this belief suddenly, but step by step. One of the greatest events in the fight was the overcoming of the Philistines by David. It was in the name of Yahwe that he went to war with them and overcame them. This event made it clear to all that Yahwe, and not the Baalim, was the strong God. Another very great event was David's taking of Jerusalem and the fact that he made it the chief place for the worship of Yahwe by putting up there the Tent and placing in it the Ark. David's

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

son, Solomon, did an even greater thing, when he put up a great and beautiful House of Worship, the Hekalu (or Temple), in Jerusalem. It was made of great stones and wood and gold. The Ark was put into it; and it became the living-place of Yahwe: the old writings say, The house was full of the glory of Yahwe. The Temple was a sign that the peoples were united as one people with Yahwe as their God.

But old beliefs do not readily come to an end. Even after the Temple was put up, numbers of people kept to the Baalim.

### (4) *The Development of Worship : Images*

Great changes came about in the forms of worship. Worship was no longer the simple thing it had been in the years of wandering. 'The high places' of Baal were made into holy places for Yahwe, and some of the ways of worshipping the Baalim were taken over for the worship of Yahwe. Offerings became more frequent, and there were more sorts of offerings than the Jews had been used to. The law given by Moses said that no image was to be made for use in worship; but now it was not uncommon to see images in the holy places of Yahwe.

There is a story in the book of Judges of a man named Micah. His mother made the discovery one day that much of her silver had been taken by somebody and she put a curse upon the person. Micah said that he had done it, and she gave him forgiveness. Then she said: 'I give up the silver to Yahwe from my hand for my son, to make a *pesel*.' The *pesel* was an image. It was made and Micah put it in his Beth Elohim, 'house of God,' together with an *ephod* and *teraphim*, which were other images. He put one of his sons, and another man, in as priests. The story goes on to say that some men of the tribe of Dan (who were Jews) came that way and made the priest a request, saying: 'Put this question through the gods (*i.e.* through the *teraphim*), will our journey go well?' The *teraphim* gave the answer: 'Before Yahwe is your journey whereon you go'—which is to say, your journey is under the eye of Yahwe. These men were going to the north to see if there was land there for their tribe: they went back and said: 'We have seen the land and it is very good.' The tribe of Dan then made a start for their new living-place and on the way came to the house of

## THE JEWS AND CANAANITES UNITED

Micah. They put it into the head of the priest to go with them, and they went off in secret, taking with them the *ephod* and *teraphim* and *pesel* which were in Micah's holy place. Micah and his men went after them. When the people of Dan put the question to them: 'What is wrong with you that you are angry with us?' Micah said: 'You take my *elohim* which I have made, and the priest, and you go off, and what have I more? and how then say you to me, What is wrong with you?' Poor Micah did not get his gods back. The people of Dan took them away and when their town in the north was ready they put up the *pesel* in their holy place. For a very long time this was a place for worship.

Here is a living picture of those far-off times; and it makes clear to us the thoughts of some of the Jews. In some way Yahwe, the El of Sinai, had become a God of whom it was possible for an image to be cut in wood, or made out of silver, and taken about from place to place—a property to be taken away by force! And the priest who went with it was the son of a son of Moses by whose mouth God said that images were not to be made for use in worship!

When after the death of Solomon the kingdom was broken in two, Jeroboam, who was king of the division in the north, would not let his people go to Jerusalem in the south for worship, because, he said, if they go there their heart will be turned to the king of the south, away from me. So he made two gold images of young oxen and put them in holy places, the one at Bethel and the other at Dan. And he said to his people: 'There is no longer any need for you to go up to Jerusalem; see, here are your *elohim*, O Israel, which took you up out of Egypt.' And the people gave worship before these images.

The ox was taken by the Canaanites and other peoples as a sign of strength, specially of sex strength. Their idea of the Baalim was, as we have said, that they made the fields fertile; and so the ox was taken as a sign of the Baalim. What Jeroboam did was to take the sign of the Baalim and make it the sign of Yahwe: when the worshippers said prayers and made offerings before the image of the ox their thought was that their worship was given to Yahwe. There was danger in this form of worship, because the people might come to have more respect for the ox than for Yahwe, and their thoughts might be turned to the Baalim and not to Yahwe.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

### (5) *The Behaviour of the People*

From the old writings we see that, from our Christian viewpoint, the level of behaviour in these times was low. The Bible does not make a secret of it. King David, who had such strong belief in Yahwe, was a man of some virtues, but in other ways was a bad man. It was not judged to be wrong for a man to have numbers of wives: Gideon, another man of Yahwe, had a number: Solomon is said to have had seven hundred wives and three hundred other women: 'and his heart was turned by his wives after other gods.' There were worse things than this.

Some Africans have the idea that the God of the sky is male and the God of the earth is female, and that through the coming together of these two the earth gives birth to grain and fruit. And their belief is that men and women, by having sex relations, are able to help in this process. These ideas are very old. In the Bible we have the name of Ashtoreth, or Astart, who was the female Baal of birth and sex relations: Solomon 'went after her.' There were other female Baalim. And in the holy places were men and women (named *qedeshim* and *qedeshoth*) with whom worshippers might have sex relations so as to make their fields more fertile. At least that was the theory at first; at the time we are reading of, it was simply, with most people at least, a reason given for wrong-doing. We have knowledge that these disgusting *qedeshim* and *qedeshoth* were to be seen even inside the limits of the House of Yahwe in Jerusalem, and money which was got by them was made use of for purposes of religion.

### (6) *The Argument*

The voice of God came to the Jews through their experiences. They got knowledge of Him as Yahwe, their saviour, through His taking them by the hand out of Egypt and by His guiding them through the waste lands into Canaan. Then in Canaan they got more knowledge. Yahwe became to them, not only the God of the mountain and of war, but the God of the land and its fertile properties. By the conditions of the Berith they were responsible to Yahwe for their behaviour, but their knowledge of God's desires for them was still very limited. The time was now coming when they were to take a great step forward.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GOD'S REVELATION THROUGH PROPHETS

#### (1) *How far were they like African Prophets?*

TO the Africans it is not strange that men are able to get news from the unseen. In sleep they are frequently conscious of voices talking to them about the present and the future. The Zulu say: 'When danger is about, numbers of people are kept safe by the Itongo (the spirit of the fathers): it comes in a dream.' In addition to this there are men who get into the condition named *isiyezi* by the Zulu; in English we say 'ecstasy.' *Isiyezi si njengokuba umuntu wafa kancinyane. Uyavuka use bona izinto angaziboni uma enge na siyezi*—'Ecstasy is a condition in which a man becomes half-dead. He is awake, but still sees things which he would not see if he were not in the condition of *isiyezi*.' In past times among the Kikuyu there was an old man named Kichura who said that sometimes at night a specially deep sleep came upon him, and in this condition he was taken out of his bed and statements were made to him by a voice, but he was not able to see who was talking. In the morning he would get the older men together and give them the words which had come to him. At one time the word was that white men would come into the country, and that they and the Kikuyu would go on living side by side—and now this has come about.

In Ila country there was a man named Mupumani, who said that, one night when he was sleeping, he was taken away by somebody—possibly it was a *musangushi*, spirit—to some place where *Namulenga*, the Maker of all things, was. *Namulenga* gave him words to take back to the people; for one thing, he said, they were not to put cattle to death, or *zemba* (go running about with spears) when the bodies of dead persons were put under the earth. *Namulenga* said to him: 'I take men off, and I make men come again to birth; it is not for people to be

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

weeping about it. . . . Go down again and give my words. Possibly men will say bad things about you, possibly they will give ear to your words and be kind to you. My eyes will be upon them.' In the morning Mupumani was awake in his house: he said he had no knowledge how he got back there. He gave out the words, and some people gave attention to them and some did not.

Sometimes—such is the belief of the Africans—a spirit comes into a man or woman: he or she, as Lamba say, is *wilwa*, or as Ila say, is *kwatwa*—‘taken a grip of’; gets *mu chiyu*—‘into an unconscious condition.’ Then a voice comes from his lips; possibly it is low and uncertain; the hearers say it is the spirit talking. One violent form of this condition is named *mothekethake* by the Suto. It is marked by strange uncontrolled motions of the body. It may come frequently upon a person; the sounding of a drum in a certain way—*kunzuma*, *kunzuma*, *kunzuma*—may make it come on. People may take it quickly one from another; a group may be seen dancing about in an uncontrolled way, as if they were in the grip of some violent impulse.

But not all those who are *wilwa* do so: some are of quiet behaviour. The writer of this book saw two women who had come a great distance to Kasenga; they said the spirit of *Mwana Leza*, the Son of God, was in them and had sent them to that place to make peace between two Chiefs who had been at war one with the other. They are named *baami* by the Ila.

The Zulu have a true saying: *Ihlonga 'ndhlebe lizwa ngomopo*—‘He who is without ears becomes a hearer in the time of trouble.’ These prophets generally come when there is much disease about, or in days of war or when there is no food or no rain, or when there is other trouble in the hearts of men. That is one reason why people are ready to give attention to their words. The prophet’s eyes are frequently turned to the past; present troubles, he says, are only to be overcome by giving up new ways of living and going back to the old. At the same time, much of his talk is about the future and about the happy days which will come if his hearers will do what he says. He does not make use of argument; he makes statements with force, not in his name but in the name of the spirit which has sent him or is in him. His language is not clear at all times; it may be full of images and strange words. It is necessary to say, in

## GOD'S REVELATION THROUGH PROPHETS

addition, that generally he does not give teaching about behaviour. The outcome of the prophet's word is frequently damaging to the people, as we see from the example of Mhlakaza and his daughter Nongquase, at whose word the Xosa put thousands of their cattle to death in the hope of being happier. On the other hand, we have to keep in mind the power of the prophet's word in effecting changes in African ways of living.

### (2) *The Earliest Prophets of the Jews*

Among the Jews, as among the Africans, there were men and women who had *isiyezi* or were *wilwa* and said out in public what came to them from the unseen in secret. They said, however, that their words were given to them by God, not by the spirits of dead men.

Samuel was said to be a *ro'eh*, i.e. a Seer, because he could see things which others were unable to see. Men like him were later named *nabi, nebiim*—‘prophet, prophets.’ In 1 Samuel x. there is an account of Saul's meeting with a band of prophets. They had instruments of music, and seem to have been in a condition like *isiyezi*; ‘and the spirit of Elohim came strongly upon him and he was like a *nabi* among them.’ From this example, and from 1 Samuel xix. 18-24, we may see how one man got into this condition suddenly from seeing others who were in it.

These *nebiim* came first in a time of great trouble, when the Jews were at war against the Philistines. They were looked upon as servants of Yahwe, voicing His designs: their words were His words. No doubt they did much to keep the Jews true to Yahwe.

### (3) *Another Sort of Prophet* .

Now if there was nothing more than this to be said about the *nebiim* they would not have much value for us. But other *nebiim* came later who were among the greatest teachers the earth has ever seen—men who were used by God to take the Jews very far on the road to Him.

There is a development of ideas which we have to keep in mind. This strange condition which is to be seen in Africa to-day and was seen in old times among the Jews, with twisting

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

of the body and other uncontrolled motions and a strange way of talking, the condition of *isiyezi* with visions and voices—all this was taken by the Jews as a sign of the spirit of Yahwe working in the *nabi*. These outer signs later became things of the past—they were not seen in the greatest prophets. But the men whose names will come before us in later parts of this book were still conscious of a power in them which was not themselves. They were named Men of Elohim, Servants of Elohim, Servants of Yahwe, the sense being that they were living very near to God and were talking in His name. Events took place which people generally were unable to see reasons for; these men saw clearly that the hand of God was in these events. They took a look into the past and saw God's hand there; they saw so clearly the great laws of God that they were able to see what would come about in the future; and so they became preachers of God's eternal righteousness to the men and women of their day.

There were false prophets in addition to the true. Their words were smooth; they said what would be pleasing to their hearers; they said Peace, Peace, when there was no peace. They became prophets for what they might make out of it. At first people were troubled when they made the discovery that these men were false; the thought came to them that Yahwe had sent a false spirit into them; but when they came to have a clearer view of God's qualities they saw that this was not so. They were certain, then, that these men were not prophets at all.

The true prophets said what they had to say without fear of men, because they were certain that their words were God's words.

### (4) *Elijah*

Such a one was that great servant of Yahwe, Elijah. We have a number of stories of his doings and of his great fight for Yahwe against Ahab and Jezebel. The greatest day was when he got all the people together with the prophets of Baal on the mountain of Carmel. He put the question to them: 'How long will you go walking on unequal legs? If Yahwe is God, go after Him; but if Baal is God, go after him.' They were making an attempt to do a thing which was not possible; to

## GOD'S REVELATION THROUGH PROPHETS

put together what will not be joined: the worship of Yahwe and of Baal.

The outcome of that great day was to make it quite certain that Yahwe was the Elohim of the land of Israel. 'Yahwe, He is Elohim; Yahwe, He is Elohim,' was the people's cry. The prophets of Baal were put to death. Some years later, under an impulse given by Elisha, the prophet who came after Elijah, there was another turn of the wheel. A violent attack was made on the family of Ahab, and the rest of the worshippers of Baal were put to death under the orders of Jehu, who became the ruler of the north kingdom.

From our point of view as Christians, we say that these were cruel acts of blood. But they did their work. In later years nobody ever made an attempt to put another god higher than Yahwe in His land of Palestine. His power as owner of the land was no longer to be doubted. The way was now ready for the great prophets.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE REVELATION BECOMES CLEARER

#### (1) *The Times in which the Great Prophets were living*

THE names of these prophets are Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. Amos came in about the year 760 B.C., Hosea in about 745, Isaiah in 739, and Micah in 724.

Amos came about forty years after Elijah. In that short time the Jews had gone a step forward as a nation. Much of their land had been taken from them by other nations after the time of Solomon, but they had now got it back again. Hundreds of years before this they had come out of the cow-keeping stage into the farming stage; now they became chiefly a trading people. Great numbers of families went to get their living in the towns. The land came chiefly into the hands of men of wealth; small farmers were shut out from the land or became servants of the great land-owners. There was a great growth of wealth, but this was chiefly in the hands of a small number of men. There were numbers of poor persons, and it was hard for them to make a living.

Such changes as these have their dangers at all times, as we see in Africa to-day. A sudden increase in material wealth is a serious test of a nation's quality. Men may come to give more thought to things than to persons. An overpowering desire for property may make the strong cruel to the feeble. Will the old religion have the strength necessary for controlling the desires of men and for moving them to do the right thing with their neighbours? In the development of material well-being will they give up their belief in God? Or will they get more self-control through a clearer knowledge of God and a more serious desire to be His servants? It is like putting the question about a young man: Will he make a foolish attempt at seeming to be a man while he keeps the thoughts and feelings of a boy who has no control over himself?

By this time some of the books of the Bible had been put

## THE REVELATION BECOMES CLEARER

down in writing. The Jews now had histories of their nation—stories of the noted men of the past, of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David. They got from them a feeling of great pride, a sense that they had an important position on earth. They had a strong belief in Yahwe, their God who had made Heaven and earth and had been their helper all through the past years. There were numbers of holy places—at Bethel, Beersheba, Dan, and Gilgal; and there was the great House of God at Jerusalem. Thousands of oxen and sheep were put to death every year as offerings to Yahwe. Holy feasts took place regularly, and to these the Jews went in great numbers. At Bethel and Dan they still gave worship to Yahwe in the form of young oxen; the pillars of wood and stone were still there. Signs of religion were everywhere. But the Jews still had some false ideas about God. They took great care that offerings were made at the right time and in the right way. Their thought was that by so doing they gave pleasure to Yahwe. But the great mass of the Jews was far from being conscious that religion is of no value without good behaviour. For them worship was one thing, and behaviour was quite another thing; they saw no relation between the two.

Another thing is to be kept in mind. A very great danger was in store for the Jews. It was coming nearer and nearer, but they were still unconscious of it when Amos came preaching. Far in the north the empire of Assyria had become very great. In its expansion it was overcoming nation after nation. In the south was another great power—Egypt. Assyria and Egypt were in competition to get control over the lands between the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean. The two little kingdoms of the Jews—Judah and Israel—were stretched across their road. When two elephants are having a fight, any little animal which gets in the way is clearly in danger. The prophets saw this clearly. They saw that destruction was coming upon their nation. They saw that the Assyrians were an instrument in the hand of God for judging the Jews if they did not give up their evil ways.

### (2) *The Prophet Amos*

About the year 760 B.C., great numbers of people were at Bethel, in the kingdom of the north, for one of the feasts of

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

religion. It was a happy sort of meeting. Blood-offerings were made, and after some parts of the animals had been put upon the altar, the worshippers took the rest as food. There was much strong drink, and there were songs and dances. The feast in honour of Yahwe became a chance for disgusting behaviour. In the middle of it a strange sound came to the ears of the worshippers: the sound of a sad song, such as is voiced at the time of death.

‘The young girl Israel has had a fall!  
She will not get up again:  
Stretched out is she on her land,  
By nobody to be lifted up! ’

They saw a rough man—a keeper of sheep from the south. His name was Amos. He had come preaching to them the word of Yahwe. The nation, he said, was to be judged for its bad ways. He saw the future fall of the Jews as clearly as if it was taking place before his eyes. Yahwe, he said, had sent locusts and disease and an earth-shock, and still they would not come back to Him. ‘Now, O Israel, get ready for a meeting with your God! It is He who gives form to the mountain, makes the wind, and gives to men knowledge of His secret mind; He who makes the daylight and the dark: His name is Yahwe, the God of armies! . . . Here is the word of Yahwe for the house of Israel: “Come after Me and you will have life! ” ’

Amos saw two things very clearly: that God is a judge, and that God is the judge of all nations. One after another the nations round about were named by him—Damascus, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab—and of every one he said that Yahwe would be the judge and send punishment upon it because of its cruel acts. No doubt these words gave pleasure to the Jews, because they had no love for these nations. But then Amos came back to them, and his words were surprising and hard: ‘This is what Yahwe says: “For three crimes of Israel, yes, for four, I will not let it go back. Because they are taking silver in exchange for a good man, and two shoes in exchange for a man in need; they go stamping down the poor like dust; a man and his father go in to the same girl to make shame of My holy name; by every altar they are the worse for drink. . . . ” ’

## THE REVELATION BECOMES CLEARER

Such was the life of the Jews as Amos saw it with the eyes of God. Their feeling was that Yahwe was their special God and would be on their side against all strong nations. Has He not given His word? Will He not keep the old Berith? Is it possible for a change to take place in Him? What sense is there in the words of this rough sheep-keeper from the land of the south—that Yahwe will send punishment upon us, the people of His special care, upon us who give Yahwe thousands upon thousands of oxen and sheep? And Amos gave them the answer. ‘Give ear to this which Yahwe says against you, Israel, against all the family which He took up out of the land of Egypt. He says: “It is true that of all the families of the earth you are the one I have had special care for; and it is for that reason I will send punishment upon you for all your wrong-doing!”’

Amos went on to say that Yahwe had no pleasure in Israel’s acts of religion. These are Yahwe’s words about them:

‘Your holy feasts? I have hate for them, and disgust.  
Your burned offerings? The smell of their smoke is not for Me.  
No, let Right be like a fountain of running water,  
And well-doing like an ever-flowing river!’

Here was something new and great—a true word of God to the Jews and to all nations. Right-doing between man and man, between ruler and ruled, between master and servant, between well-off and poor, in business, in the family, in law, in everything—let this be like a great running river making the nation sweet and clean and beautiful! Only by right living of that sort is God to be pleased!

The Jews did not take to heart these words of Amos. He was turned out of Bethel and had to go back to Tekoa. There he took to writing the words of God which came to him. He was the first of the prophets who put his teaching into a book.

### (3) *The Prophet Hosea*

There was a sad story in the life of Hosea, who came to Israel (the kingdom of the north) after Amos. He was married to a woman for whom his love was very great, but after the birth of their first baby she did wrong. Hosea gave his wife forgiveness and she went on living in his house for six years;

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

then she went away and became at last a slave-woman. This sad experience made Hosea wise. It came to him that thousands of houses were like his: the wrong his wife had done was a common one. His sorrow became a key to the sorrow of Yahwe. As he had love for this woman, and had given her forgiveness time and again, so Yahwe had love for the Jews: they had not been true to Him and still He had given them forgiveness again and again.

Yahwe, said Hosea, will do all it is possible to do to get the wandering Israel to come back to Him. But the process is hard. Only by a change of heart is the way open for turning back; and that change of heart will come only through knowledge that the old ways were false. Yahwe will make Israel see that her lovers, the Baalim, are unable to give the things for which she went after them.

In the mind of Hosea there was the picture of the coming of the Assyrians and of their taking away the Jews into a strange land. He sees in this act the purpose of God; it is to be done so that the Jews may by a change of heart get back to Him.

Hosea got his deep knowledge of the heart of God through his sad experience. And he made God's way his way. He went in search of his wife, gave money to those who had her, took her back into his house. For a time they were to be separate till after testing her he saw that her heart was truly changed, and then she became his wife again.

This beautiful picture comes to the heart of all who, by their experience, have knowledge of what the love of man and woman is in the highest sense. Later on, our Lord said that a man was to take a look into his heart and see there what love he had for his sons and daughters, and then be certain that God's love is like his love, but very much greater. So Hosea, conscious of his love for his wife though she had done him wrong, saw that the love of God is strong and kind and ready for forgiveness—far greater than the best love of a husband for his wife.

Hosea saw with clear eyes, as Amos saw, the wrong-doing of the Jews. His views about religion were the same as Amos's. He said: 'Yahwe's desire is for mercy and not for offerings.' But Hosea went deeper than Amos did. His great word is

## THE REVELATION BECOMES CLEARER

*Chesedh*—one of the Hebrew words whose sense it is impossible to give in one English or African word. The man who has *chesedh* is good and kind to the poor, to the unhappy, and to the wrong-doer; *chesedh* is love and mercy and grace; he who has it is true in his thoughts and feelings to men and to God; he is upright in his acts. *Chesedh* is a quality of the good heart from which comes love, pity, and keeping faith. And Hosea's word to the Jews and to all nations was that God has this virtue.

The Jews in the kingdom of the north did not take his word to heart; there was no turning from their evil ways. The end came in the year 722 B.C. The king of Assyria took Samaria, took the people away into strange lands, and put others in their places. After that the kingdom of Judah was the only part of Palestine in which the Jews were living.

### (4) *The Prophet Isaiah*

Amos and Hosea came to the kingdom of the north, Israel; Isaiah came to the kingdom of the south, Judah, and his work of preaching went on for forty years. His word was like that of other prophets; but he had in addition something specially important to say, that God is holy.

He has given an account of the vision which made him a prophet. He was in the great House of God at Jerusalem, and there got into the condition of *isiyezi*,<sup>1</sup> it seems, and saw things he had not seen before—things which others did not see. He says: 'I saw Yahwe seated, high and lifted up; His skirts were covering the floor of the House, and angels were resting on their wings round about and over Him: every angel had six wings, two covering the face, two covering the body, and two for flight. They kept crying one to another: "Holy! Holy! Holy is Yahwe of Armies! all the earth is full of His glory."'

Let us make an attempt to get clearly the sense of this word 'holy.' In the earliest times it is probable that its sense was like that of the African word *ila*, *era*, *zila*. Some foods are *zila* to certain persons; these foods may not be taken. Some acts are *zila*; they may not be done. Certain persons are *zila* at

<sup>1</sup> See page 109.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

times. Certain words are *zila*; and certain places. The idea is that these things have a connection with danger; persons keep out of the way of them for fear of the effects. The Hebrew word is *qadosh*, and its sense is 'separate,' 'put on one side.' If at first its sense was no more than that of *zila*, it came later to have a much deeper sense; words, like persons, have a history. In course of time *qadosh* was said of things, places, and persons which had a special connection with unseen powers, and later still with those which had a connection with God. The Ark was *qadosh*; there was danger in putting a hand upon it: the effect was death. The priests were *qadosh*; the place for worship was *qadosh*. When the idea of God in the mind of the Jews came to be clearer there was a development in the sense of *qadosh*. In his vision, voices came to Isaiah saying: 'Holy! Holy! Holy is Yahwe!' The sense of this is that God is separate from men, and not dependent on them, God is outside the range of their thoughts, without limit in His self-existence, and clean—clean—clean—with nothing of the evil in Him which is in man. The Holy One is He with whom no comparison is possible. He is the One to whom nobody is able to come near. He is the completely opposite to man: 'I am God and not man, the Holy One in the middle of you' (Hosea xi. 9). He is the One lifted up over all. All this and much more is the sense of that word which came to the ears of Isaiah out of the unseen: 'Holy, Holy, Holy!' And when he saw that vision he became conscious of his unclean heart. The knowledge came to him that men are to be holy as God is holy; face to face with God he was conscious that he was unclean. And how was he made clean? Not through the offering of oxen to God: the angel put a burning stone to his lips, and the sense of this is that forgiveness and the cleaning of his heart came from God when he no longer kept secret what he had done wrong.

It was after this experience in the Temple that Isaiah went out preaching to the Jews. He was quite certain that the Holy Yahwe would send punishment upon them if they did not make a change in their way of living. He did not say there would be a complete destruction of the nation: his belief was that what was named the *Sheerith*—i.e. those of the nation who were still living after the great punishment—would be kept safe.

## THE REVELATION BECOMES CLEARER

### (5) *The Prophet Micah*

While Isaiah was still preaching to the Jews, Micah came to another part of the country. From his book we get a sad picture of the wrong-doing which was common in his day. His preaching was very much the same as that of the other prophets. Here is the substance of it. People were putting the question: What things are pleasing to Yahwe?

How am I to come before Yahwe  
And give worship to God the Most High?  
Am I to come before Him with burned-offerings,  
With young cows of one year?  
Will Yahwe be pleased with thousands of sheep,  
With ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Am I to give my first son as an offering for my wrong-doing,  
The fruit of my body for the evil in my soul?

And the answer which Micah gave for God was this:

O man, He has given you the power to see what is good;  
And what is Yahwe looking for from you,  
But to be upright and a lover of mercy  
And to go on walking quietly with your God?

## CHAPTER X

### JEREMIAH

#### (1) *The Book of the Law*

FOR a number of years the teaching of the prophets seemed to have no outcome. It is true that while good Hezekiah was king certain changes were made in worship,<sup>1</sup> but under Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, the behaviour of the Jews became worse than ever. He was king for fifty-five years, from 696 to 641 B.C. Then in the time of King Josiah, who came after him, a great event took place. We have in 2 Kings xxii. an account of the discovery of the *Book of the Law* in the House of God at Jerusalem. While Shaphan, the King's secretary, was reading the book to him, the heart of Josiah was greatly troubled, because he saw that the behaviour of the nation was not in harmony with the teaching of the Book of God's Law. He got together all the people in Jerusalem, the small and the great, and he gave them a reading of the Book. They were all deeply moved. There and then they made an agreement to be guided by Yahwe and keep His laws.

The *Book of the Law* is part of Deuteronomy. It is full of strong words about wrong-doing. Here is the substance of it, put very shortly: 'Give ear, O Israel, Yahwe our God is one Yahwe; and you are to have love for Yahwe your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.'<sup>2</sup> Yahwe, the Book says, is Ruler of Heaven and earth; the God of gods, the Lord of lords. It is He who gives rewards to men of good life, and who sends punishment upon the wrong-doer. He is a God to be feared, a flaming fire. He is spirit, and so quite unlike any and every material form; it is impossible to make a thing in His image. The Book says the Jews are to be a holy nation, having in mind at all times that they are servants of a holy and loving God; and love is to be the guiding rule of their behaviour—love to God and love to man.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xviii. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy vi. 4, 5.

The *Book of the Law* puts before men the right view of religion: only a true heart with right feelings has value in the eyes of God. But the Book does not come up to the teaching of the prophets in putting an end to all burned-offerings of oxen and sheep. The time for this had not come. The Book said that offerings were still to be made so that the Jews might be kept in fear of the Lord, their God.

There is one other part of the teaching of this Book which we will keep in mind. Its teaching is that virtue is at all times rewarded with blessings, such as healthy bodies, happy days, wealth, fertile fields; while, on the other hand, wrong-doing has its punishment in unhappy events, disease, sudden death. Do this, so that all may be well with you: this seems to be the substance of it.

(2) *The Changes made by King Josiah*

Now when the discovery of this Book was made, and the hearts of the Jews were moved by its strong words, they and their king made certain changes for the better in their way of living. The chief thing they did was to make a rule that from that time all worship, with offerings and feasts, was to take place at the House of God in Jerusalem. All holy places outside Jerusalem were pulled down. The one place of worship was to be a sign to the Jews that Yahwe was one. They were not to give any more thought to Baalim, and all images were to be broken up. A cleaner way of life was to be forced upon the Jews through the law. It was a very good law, because it made rules for men's behaviour to one another in all the relations of life.

But it seems that, after all, the changes which were made did not go very deep. It is not hard to make a law that people are all to go to one House of God for worship; it is not hard to give an order that other holy places are to be pulled down and images broken up: it is possible to put such laws into force. It is harder, in fact it is impossible, to get men by law to do the right thing to one another. For this a change of heart is needed.

The change in worship was effected. Offerings to Yahwe were made at Jerusalem—the Jews more than ever got joy out of meeting there from time to time for common worship. The feeling that by doing this they were pleasing Yahwe was a great comfort to them. And it seemed that the good things

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

kept before their eyes by the Book of Deuteronomy, as a reward for virtue, had been given to them. The dangers seemed to be past which the prophets said were coming from the north. Things were going well. Without doubt Yahwe was pleased!

It came, then, as a very great shock to the people of Judah when Josiah, their king, was put to death in a war against Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt. This event took place at Megiddo in 608 B.C. Thereafter for a time the Jews were ruled by Egyptians. Was this, then, the reward for right-doing? How came it about that Yahwe let a strange nation be masters of His special people? They had no sense of evil in their hearts: what wrong have we done against Yahwe that He lets this punishment come upon us?—such was their question.

So there was another turning away from Yahwe. The people took up the worship of other gods again. Images were put up in the House of God; women made cakes to the Queen of Heaven<sup>1</sup>; sons and daughters were given as burned-offerings. Wrong-doing of all sorts went on.

Things went on like this till the end. In the north the Chaldeans had overcome the Assyrians; in the year 596 B.C. their king, Nebuchadnezzar, made an attack upon Judah and took away some thousands of the people into Babylon. Some years later there was another attack; the rest of the people of Judah, or all but a small number who got away into Egypt, were taken away, and Jerusalem was burned. This was the downfall of the nation. In a strange land the Jews were to go on learning about God.

### (3) *The Prophet Jeremiah*

It was in the last forty years of the nation's existence that Jeremiah did his work.

Everything that other prophets had said, Jeremiah said again. What he was and what he did were even more important than his words. It was not natural for him to say sharp, wounding things. But he had a great power of seeing deeply; his knowledge of the heart of God was great; and he was forced on to do a work for which naturally he had no desire. He had to take sides with God against his people, because his love for them was so great; he saw clearly that their way of living would

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah vii. 18.

## JEREMIAH

be the cause of their destruction if they did not make a change. Year after year he had the grief of seeing himself and his words hated. With no friends among men, he was pushed back upon God. All his sad experiences took him very near to God. It is this fact which makes Jeremiah the greatest of all the prophets.

The thoughts of other teachers were about the nation: Yahwe, they said, was the God of the nation. It was with the nation that the Berith was made at Sinai. In those old days a person did not seem to be separate from his nation, his family, his group. It was the same in Africa. And without question it is good for us to have thoughts about ourselves in connection with other men; every man is his brother's keeper, and in some degree is responsible for his doings. But it is true, on the other hand, that every person has a separate existence and is responsible for what he himself does. Now Jeremiah was the first great teacher who gave weight to this fact in religion. He saw every man as a person face to face with God. At first his preaching was to the nation; but when he saw how little true change was made in behaviour after the discovery of the Law-book, and when he saw the certain destruction of the nation, his thoughts and words became less for the nation and more for persons.

Jeremiah's knowledge of the heart of man goes deep.

More false than all things is the heart,  
It is ill past all hope;  
Who is able to have knowledge of it?  
I who am Yahwe, I take a look into the heart,  
Testing the mind,  
Rewarding every man in the measure of his life,  
In the measure of the fruit of his doings.

And Jeremiah's word to the Jews, and to all nations, is that a man may himself have faith in the living God separately from his group or family or nation.

Happy is the man who puts his faith in Yahwe,  
Whose faith Yahwe is!  
He will be like a tree planted near water,  
A tree whose roots are stretched out to the river;  
It has no fear at the coming of heat,  
Its leaves are ever green;  
It is not troubled when there is no rain  
And goes on giving fruit!

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

### (4) *The New Berith*

Jeremiah, then, saw religion as the business of a person, who is a man or woman, with God who is a person: the business of these two, separate from all others. His belief is put into the words which he said about the new Berith. The old Berith was made between Yahwe on one side and the Jews on the other side. It was looked upon by Jeremiah as broken, past all hope of being made again—broken, not by Yahwe's desire, but by the wrong-doing of the Jews. Looking into the future, Jeremiah saw a time coming when a new Berith would take the place of the old one. He said:

'Days are coming—so says Yahwe—when I will make a new *Berith* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the Berith which I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand out from the land of Egypt. But this is the Berith which I will make with the Jews after those days, so says Yahwe; I will put My law in them, writing it on their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they will be to Me a people. No longer will they have to give teaching, every man to his neighbour and every man to his brother, about how to get knowledge of Yahwe; because they all will have knowledge of Me, from the least to the greatest; because I will let them have forgiveness for their wrong-doing, and will no more keep their sin in mind.'

'This new Berith,' Jeremiah said, 'will be made with the nation.' Yes, but it is a different nation: a nation which is made up of men and women who have the strong desire to do right.

In this way Jeremiah made a change in the very idea of religion. The Jews, like the Africans, had the idea that religion was the business of a group. Jeremiah said it is at all times a business between a person and his God. Society may be broken up, old ways of life may be quite changed, but so long as a person has a living faith in God, and a living desire to do what is right, it will be well with him. The Jews were to put this idea to the test while they were living in a strange land. Numbers of them came to see it was true. Africans may put it to the test to-day when the old conditions are giving place to new conditions. They will see it is true.

## CHAPTER XI

### REVELATION THROUGH HARD LIVING AND SORROW

#### (i) *The Conditions*

THE Jews, to the number of forty thousand, were now living in Babylon, a strange land to them, seven hundred miles from the country of their birth. They no longer had a king—they were under the hard rule of the Chaldeans. This is not to say they were shut up in prisons. Most of them were placed in the great towns, where they were put to the work of building for their masters; others were free to go farming and trading. They were banded together in groups with the older men as chiefs. The Chaldeans were a nation of great power and wealth. They had their gods: there was Marduk, who was said to be Lord of Heaven and earth; there was Bel, 'the Lord of lands'; and there were others.

This event came as a very great shock to the Jews. By reading the Book of Lamentations and some of the Psalms, which were produced about this time, we get a clear view of their feelings. The destruction of Jerusalem took the last bit of hope from their hearts. They put questions to themselves. The Chaldeans had overcome Yahwe's nation: was this not to say that the gods of the Chaldeans were stronger than Yahwe? Yahwe's living-place was the great House at Jerusalem: that was now broken up and burned; where now was Yahwe? He seemed to have gone away from the earth, giving up His people to destruction. There seemed no other way for them now but to take Marduk and Bel as their helpers, to put the past out of mind, and to become one with the Chaldeans, their masters.

The destruction of the nation seemed to be the end of all things for the Jews. Looking back now we are able to see, as the great prophets saw, that it was part of God's design for His school of nations. The Jews were to be the teachers of all peoples. If they were to be teachers it was necessary for them

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

first to be learners. Only through the destruction of the House of God were men able to come to the knowledge that God is a spirit and that His living-place was not made with hands—that men are His true House and their hearts are the offerings which are well-pleasing in His eyes. The blood-offerings had to be put a stop to, for a time at least, so that men might get the true view that the blood of sheep and oxen gives no pleasure to God—that the offering pleasing to God is a broken spirit. The Jews had to be taken into a strange land to get the certain knowledge that God is not the God of one land or of one nation, but the God of all the earth.

It was not the purpose of God to let the Jews become mixed completely with the Chaldeans; they had to be kept separate while their schooling went on. The great instrument in God's hands for this was the prophet Ezekiel.

### (2) *The Prophet Ezekiel*

The fact to keep in mind about Ezekiel is that he was a priest first and then a prophet. He came of a family of priests; from his early days he was used to the worship in the House of God with its blood-offerings. Offerings had much more value in his eyes than they had for such men as Amos, Hosea and Jeremiah. He was taken away with the first band of the Jews in 596 B.C. and five years later, he says in his book: 'the heavens became open and I saw visions of God.' So he became a prophet.

Now, the important thing is that he saw these visions of God in a strange land, not, like Isaiah, in the House of God at Jerusalem. That is to say, Yahwe was not limited to the land of Canaan. This was the common view of the Jews; and Ezekiel had certain knowledge that it was a wrong view.

He put into strange language what he saw while he was in *iskiyezi*. He saw no form but something which had the look of fire and light; it was the glory of Yahwe; and he was overcome by the wonder of it. By such visions as this he became conscious that God is holy, and that the most a man is able to do at the thought of Him is to go down on his face in wonder and fear.

The voice of Yahwe came to Ezekiel and he gave answers, in the name of Yahwe, to the questions which were troubling

## REVELATION THROUGH HARD LIVING AND SORROW

the Jews. They had doubts about the righteousness of Yahwe. Ezekiel said that the sad events of the past and the present were a punishment from Yahwe, but that Yahwe in His mercy would have forgiveness for all those who gave up their wrong-doing.

Ezekiel did everything in his power to make the Jews a separate people. He got ready for the building of a new House of God when they went back to Jerusalem—he was quite certain that they would go back. He made rules for the burned-offerings and for the feasts. No strange persons were to put foot into the holy place. The priests were to give teaching about what was holy and what was unclean. The Jews were to be marked off from all the other nations by the care with which they kept the rules of worship. More than ever Yahwe was to be the only God of the Jews; and in every detail they were to keep stiffly to the observation of the forms of their religion. Other men gave Ezekiel help. Books were produced; laws were framed and teaching about them was given to the people. They had no House of God in Babylon and so were not able to make their offerings, as before, at the altar. But they had regular meetings on the seventh day (the sabbath) and their places of meeting came to be named *synagogues*. These places had a very important position in the life of the Jews from this time forward. Prayers were offered and there were readings from the holy books.

We see that Ezekiel and his friends had a place in God's design. A great number of the new laws were based on the prophets' teaching that right relations between men are pleasing to God and these laws made it possible for people to see what those right relations were. By making the Jews different and separate from other peoples it was possible to keep the religion safe till better times. Had it not been for Ezekiel the Jews might have gone out of existence as a people—and with them how much of value to all nations would have gone!

### (3) *The Servant of Yahwe*

About twenty-five years after Ezekiel's teaching was ended another prophet came: we have no knowledge of his name, but his words are in the book of Isaiah and he is sometimes named Second Isaiah.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

The hopes of the Jews were very low at this time. The years were going and there seemed to be no chance of getting free from Babylon and going back to their land. They were putting the question: Does God no longer give any thought to us: will He never be pleased with us again? Why had all these troubles come upon them? Why. . . . Why. . . . Why? The answer came through this prophet that the Jews who were still true to Yahwe were the Servant of Yahwe, and it was Yahwe's purpose to make this Servant His instrument in giving light to all nations. These were Yahwe's words through the prophet's mouth:

To put the tribes of Jacob back in their place,  
To get the people of Israel together again—  
This is a work not great enough for My Servant;  
Yes, I will make you a light to the nations,  
So that My salvation may go out to the farthest limit of the earth.

Other peoples, says the prophet, have no respect for the Servant; in their eyes he is feeble and poor and without position; but in the future they will see that their salvation came to them by reason of Israel's pain. This is what they will say:

He was looked down upon by men and turned away from;  
A man of pains and well used to grief;  
As one from whom the face of men is turned,  
We had no respect for him, gave him no attention;  
But it was our disease he took upon himself,  
Ours was the pain he took;  
Our thought was that he was troubled  
By a blow from God's hand:  
But he was wounded because of our wrong-doing,  
Crushed through our sins;  
It was for our well-being he was given blows,  
Blows upon him—well-being for us!  
We had all gone from the road, like sheep,  
We had every one taken a way for himself,  
And Yahwe put on him  
The weight of our wrong-doing.<sup>1</sup>

This prophet said a true word about pain; it sometimes comes to a person, or to a people, like the pain of a woman giving

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah liii. 3-6.

## REVELATION THROUGH HARD LIVING AND SORROW

birth, for the good of others. When reading these words our thoughts are taken forward to our Lord Jesus Christ. They are true of Him. But in the mind of the prophet they were said first of all about the true Israel; and how true it is that the knowledge we have of God has come to us in a great measure through their pains!

### (4) *The Fruit of the Seed*

In the year 538 B.C. Cyrus, king of the Persians, made an attack upon Babylon and overcame it. About this time there came another unnamed prophet who saw in Cyrus God's instrument for making the Jews free and letting them go back to their land. His voice came out of the dark night to say that the day was at hand.

It is in the teaching of this prophet that the seed planted by Moses, Amos and others comes to full fruit. His thoughts about God are the clearest and most certain which we have in the Old Testament. Other prophets had the idea that Yahwe was the greatest of gods: this prophet said that other gods had no existence; they were nothing; names only. Yahwe is the only God. He is the Maker of all things on earth and in the sky; He is over all and greater than all: in comparison with Him all persons, and all nations, are very, very small. His power and His mind are without limit. Though He is high and uplifted, He is not far from men; He has knowledge of them, is their guide; and He is looking for righteousness and clean behaviour.

Here are some of this prophet's words:

See, the Lord Yahwe is coming with power,  
He takes care of His people like one who takes care of his sheep;  
He takes up the lambs with His arm,  
He goes with them in His breast,  
And the mother-sheep He is guiding gently.

By what man were the waters ever measured in his hollow hand,  
Or Heaven ruled off with thumb and little finger?  
By Him islands are lifted like a very little thing.  
Even Lebanon is not enough for burning,  
Its cattle are not enough for an offering!

What comparison then are you able to make with El?  
By Him the heavens are stretched out like a curtain,  
Stretched out like a tent.

What comparison then will you make with Me,

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

With what make Me equal? says the Holy One  
Let your eyes be lifted up; take a look.  
Who made these stars?

He by whom they are massed in order,  
He by whom all their names are named!  
For fear of Him, so full of power, so strong,  
Not one of them does not give ear.

Why do you say, O Jacob,  
'My way is not noted by Yahwe,  
My God has no thought for my rights?'

Come now! Have you no knowledge?  
Has it not ever come to your ears  
That Yahwe is an eternal God,  
The Maker of earth from end to end?  
He never gives way, is never tired;  
His mind is outside the range of our thought.  
Giver of strength to the tired,  
Into the feeble He puts a greater power.  
Weariness may overcome the young men,  
Strong young people may give way,  
But those who have hope in Yahwe get new strength;  
They put out wings like eagles;  
Running they are not tired,  
Walking they do not get feeble.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xl. 10-31.

## CHAPTER XII

### GETTING READY FOR THE GREAT REVELATION

#### (1) *The Conditions*

IN the year 537 B.C. King Cyrus let numbers of the Jews go back to Palestine and others went later. It is not necessary to give here a full account of the events up to the time of the coming of the Lord Jesus. It is enough to say that there were great troubles in those five hundred years. The Jews were no longer a free nation as they had been in the days of King Solomon. They were under the rule of stronger nations. First the Persians, then the Greeks, Egyptians and Syrians, and later the Romans were over them. For most of the time their chief men were the High Priests. At first they did not have much land outside Jerusalem and their country was never again of the size it had been before. Towns were put up by the Greeks, and Greek ways of thought and living and the Greek language came to have a great effect upon some of the Jews. We may say that in some measure the Jews were like the Africans of to-day in touch with the peoples of Europe who have come into their country and are ruling it. In a number of ways the Greeks were at a higher stage of development than the Jews; but they were not worshippers of God like the Jews. Their ways had a strong attraction for some of the Jews, who took over their dress and language and gave up the religion of their fathers. Some of their masters did everything in their power to put an end to the religion and the separate existence of the Jews, and to make them all take over the language and behaviour of Greeks. This process had a great effect upon numbers of Jews living outside their country, but it did not have much effect upon the Jews who were in Palestine itself: their feeling for their old way of life and their religion was very strong among the mass of the people; they kept to themselves so far as was possible. Life itself was of less value to them than their religion.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

In fact when, by the orders of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian-Greek king, there was an attempt to get one of the priests to make an offering upon the altar of a false god, he said: 'We will not give ear to the king's words and go from our way of worshipping, to the right or to the left.' That day a war was started which went on from 168 to 135 B.C.—the War of the Maccabees.

### (2) *The Knowledge They Had*

Let us go back to the years after 537 B.C. In God's hard school the Jews had become certain of a number of facts. The true Jews were conscious that there is only one God and that He is ruler of the heavens and the earth; that God is the Holy One before whom men are feeble and unclean; that every man may come near to God by himself in prayer; and that to make God pleased it is not necessary for oxen to be burned as offerings to Him. This knowledge had come to them through the facts of their experience and the teaching of the prophets.

But there were still some questions to which they had no answer. The old, old question was still there: Why do some good people have so much pain and trouble while some bad people are well off and happy? Why, if God is good and kind, is there all this pain? The writer of the Book of Job put this question very clearly: it is one of the greatest of all books because in it the hard question is faced so seriously. It was harder to get the answer because for a long time, while men were certain of God's power and righteousness, they had not come to a clear knowledge of life after death—a life in which the things will be put right which seem to be wrong now. Even when this knowledge came to them the reason for pain was not made completely clear; but with this hope the good man was able to have faith in God, as we see in the Psalms.

### (3) *Bridging the Space between Man and God*

There were other questions about God. Prophets had said that God is very high and lifted up, unlike men, separate from them and far. This is true. But it is possible to get a wrong view because we see only one side of what is true, not all sides.

## GETTING READY FOR THE GREAT REVELATION

For a complete view of God much more knowledge is necessary than the teachers of the Jews had.

This one-sided teaching had certain important effects. If God is so far off that He is out of touch with men and material things, how did He make things at the start? And how are men to get knowledge of His purpose and desire?

In the old days the beliefs had been simple. In Genesis, chapter ii., it is said that the act of God was like the act of man: God took earth and made (*bumba*) man's body from it, as a woman makes (*bumba*) a pot; then God sent His breath into man's nose and this is how man became a living being. But this belief was over simple for the people who had the idea that God was completely separate from man, a being quite other than man: their view is seen in the first verses of Genesis. God said: 'Let there be . . .' and all things came into existence: He put His thought into words and things *were*; He did not come into touch with them. Again, when belief was simpler, men said God came among them talking the language of men—as He came to Adam and Eve; then later they took the view that God gave knowledge of His purpose through sign-reading; but when the idea became common that God was very far off and quite other than man, men put other beings in between to be like the *indunas* who come between a great African chief and his people. There were angels like Gabriel. God's Word and God's Wisdom came to be like persons, bridging the space between God and man.

The Jews put into three divisions the books which make up the Old Testament—their Bible. There was, first, Torah; second, the Prophets; and third, the Wisdom books. The first five books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—made up Torah, a word which has the sense of 'Teaching.' Torah was made the controlling authority of the nation. It was taken to be the statement of God's desires for the Jews, the record of what knowledge of Himself He had been pleased to give to men, and of the right relations between man and man. This was what men had to do in all things and at all times. The teaching of Torah was that true religion was not right opinion or even right belief only: true religion was doing things rightly by the conscious act of a man's mind.

When adjustments had to be made to changed conditions,

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

great teachers made other rules in harmony with Torah; and so in time there came to be a great mass of teaching handed on by word of mouth. Week by week, at meetings in the synagogues, in all the towns, this teaching was given after reading Torah. This went on for over four hundred years till Torah became, as it were, part of the blood of the Jews. How great a place it took in the mind of the true Jews is seen in Psalm cxix.—the longest of Psalms—which is completely taken up with the writer's thoughts about Torah.

In the book of Job there is a picture of a man living in harmony with Torah. He was talking of the time when he was a happy man.

Men gave me blessing when my name came to their ears,  
Men who saw me said good things of me;  
Because I was the saviour of the poor at their crying,  
Those without father and help;  
People in great trouble gave me their blessing:  
I made the heart of the widow happy;  
I put on the robe of kind acts,  
A coat and a head-dress of righteousness;  
I was eyes to the blind,  
I was feet to those who had not the power of walking,  
I was father to the poor,  
Taking up their cause, though it was not mine;  
By me the mouth-bones of the cruel man were smashed,  
By me his teeth were forced to let go their grip of other men's flesh.

### (4) *The Offerings*

It would be foolish to say that all the Jews kept the law at all times and in all ways. They were men and women with strong impulses like ourselves and frequently did wrong. But in doing wrong they were conscious that their acts were unpleasing to their holy God. How were they to put themselves right again with Him?

The prophets said that Yahwe was full of pity and had mercy on the wrong-doer who made his heart open to Him. Yahwe had no need for offerings to make Him kind. We see in the Psalms (xxxii., for example) how men were conscious of God's forgiveness. In Torah, on the other hand, all sorts of rules were made for offerings for the purpose of keeping men in right relations with Yahwe. Torah said that if a man did wrong

## GETTING READY FOR THE GREAT REVELATION

'with a high hand'—that is to say, if he did it on purpose—he was to be outlawed, or put to death: but for unconscious wrong-doing which was not the outcome of a bad heart, offerings were to be made for forgiveness.

By the Torah a number of things and persons in certain conditions were said to be 'unclean.' These had to be made 'clean.' For example, women were 'unclean' for some days after giving birth: Mary, the mother of Jesus, had to make an offering of two birds, one as an *olah* (a burned-offering, 'that which goes up') and one as *chattath* (a sin-offering), so that she might be made clean. Persons who had come near a dead body were 'unclean,' as were those who had anything to do with some animals which were said to be 'unclean.' If a person did such things unconsciously and later became conscious of what he had done, he had to take a lamb or goat to the priest as a sin-offering; it was put to death, some of the blood was put on the altar, and the fat was burned 'as a smell pleasing to Yahweh.' If a man got property from another by a trick, he had to give it back and more in addition; and then he had to take a he-goat as an offering for wrong-doing.

The great sin-offering was made once a year on the tenth day of the seventh month: it was to take away all sorts of evil which had been overlooked in the past year. On that day only the High Priest went inside the curtain by which the most holy place was kept separate from the rest of the House of God; he put in there the blood of the goat which was put to death as a sin-offering for all the nation. Another goat was taken; the High Priest put his hands on its head and made public all the wrong-doing of the people and then sent the goat away into the waste places; it went, taking all the sin with it.

There were other sorts of offerings, such as *shelem*, 'peace-offering,' and *tamid*, the offering which was made every morning and evening and went on burning all day. Thousands of lambs, oxen, goats, and a great amount of meal, wine and oil, were offered in the House of God every year.

In these offerings there were two things: the thing which was seen by the eye, and the thing which was in the offerer's heart. The thing seen was the animal or other thing offered, and specially the blood of the animal which was put to death. In Leviticus it is said: 'the life (or, soul) of the meat is in the

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

blood and I have given it to you upon the altar to make a covering for your souls, because it is the blood which makes a covering by reason of the life' (xvii. 11). The Hebrew word used here is *kipper*—‘put a cover over.’ In the book of Genesis it is said that Jacob, who had done a wrong to his brother Esau, sent him a number of cattle saying to himself: ‘Let me put a cover over his face by these things given,’ that is to say: ‘Let me make his heart soft, kind, so that the wrong I did him will be overlooked.’ So the thought was that the blood was a cover over the wrong-doing of men, keeping it from view. The blood was the chief thing seen; but the important thing was that which was in the offerer himself: the opening of the heart to God, sometimes by the act of offering only, or sometimes in a form of words. Good men were conscious that the important thing was the opening of the heart, not the offering.

When, after reading the strong words of the prophets to the effect that offerings were of no use without a clean heart in the offerers, and the words of Jeremiah about the new Berith, we go through all the rules of Torah about these offerings it seems that we are coming down to a lower level of religion. But all the time we have need to keep in mind our picture of God’s school. The Jews were not ready to go up into the higher division. They had still to be kept in the lower division and go through the hard training of the Law. This was God’s way with them: He had better things in store for them when they were ready.

## CHAPTER XIII

# THE SONGS OF A PEOPLE

### (1) *The Song Book*

IT is a true saying: 'What the heart is in man, the book of Psalms is in the Bible'—the chief point. Without this book we would not have clear knowledge of what their religion was to the Jews. If our opinion had to be formed only from parts of the Torah it would seem that the Jews were interested in little more than keeping the laws and making offerings. The Psalms, which are the song book of the House of God and the synagogues, give us another view. Here we see the Jews with songs upon their lips and in their hearts. Here men of God are putting their deepest feelings in beautiful words. In their meetings for worship their feelings were voiced in songs about the power and glory and love of God. They had songs of joy for happy days; sad songs for days when things went wrong. Their prayers were frequently put into song.

The song book as we have it to-day, was not all produced at one time. The earliest songs were made in the days of King David; the latest were made in the days of the Maccabees, almost eight hundred years after David. No doubt the early songs underwent some changes in that long time. They were all put in the order we now have them about 130 B.C.

If, now, we put the question: What did the song writers say about God? we will not get the same views from all of them on all points.

### (2) *The Power and Glory of God*

The song writers give God different names: El, Elohim, Yahwe, Yah (short for Yahwe), Adonay ('Lord'), Most High. To all of them He is a person, not a blind force working in things. They say He does things as men do them: He sees, He gives ear, He goes to war, He is angry.

He has taken a look down from His holy high-place,  
From Heaven He has seen the earth.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

These are mind-pictures and the thought in them is that God is acting at all times in the natural forces, in events, and in the life of men.

God is the Maker of all things; the sea is His and the dry land. This is beautifully said in the civth Song among others:

O Yahwe, my God, You are very great,  
You are clothed with honour and glory,  
Covered with a robe of light. . . .  
By You the heavens are stretched out like the cloth of a tent.  
Taking dark clouds for Your carriage,  
Driving on the wings of the wind,  
Sending winds to take Your word,  
Making fire and flame Your servants. . . .  
What numbers of Your works there are, O Yahwe!  
All of them made in wisdom!  
The earth is full of what You have made.  
And there is the great wide sea  
Where are unnumbered things in motion,  
Living things, great and small, made by You. . . .  
Their eyes are all fixed on You in hope  
To give them their food at the right time;  
And You give with open hand. . . .

Again in the xixth Song:

The heavens make public God's glory,  
The sky says loudly what His hands have done.  
Day after day takes up the story,  
Night after night gives knowledge of Him.  
There is no talking, there are no words,  
There is not a sound for the ear.  
But through all the earth their voice has gone out,  
Their words to the earth's end.

### *(3) God is Everywhere at all Times*

The song makers sometimes seem to say that God is limited to certain places, but however true this may have been of some of them the general teaching is that God is everywhere. There is no getting away from His all-seeing eye. He is at the same time in all places: on earth, in heaven, and even in the same dark under-land (named Sheol) where the shades of men are.

Where will I go from Your spirit,  
Or where will I take myself to, away from Your face?  
If I go up to Heaven, You are there;  
If I make Sheol my bed, You are there.

## THE SONGS OF A PEOPLE

If I take the wings of the morning,  
And make a flight to the end of the sea,  
Even there Your hand will be upon me  
And Your right hand will take a grip of me (cxxix. 7-10).

God is not only everywhere but His working is to be seen everywhere and in all things. Every event takes place by the design of God. He is Lord over all, not only over material things but over men. He is able to do all things which He has a desire to do. He is King not only of one nation but over all peoples, and as such His power is unlimited and His authority may not be questioned.

### (4) *What is Desired by God*

The song makers, like the prophets, are certain that the desire of God is for righteousness in men.

Yahwe, who may have a place in Your tent?  
Who may have a living-place on Your holy mountain?  
He whose walk is without error,  
Whose behaviour is upright,  
Whose words come straight from the heart;  
On whose tongue there is no evil talk,  
Who will not do wrong to his friend,  
Who does not give his neighbour a bad name. . . . (xv. 1-3).

Sometimes the songs give approval to the offerings which men make to God, but again and again they say that what God is looking for is not offerings but a true heart.

In offerings with blood or without  
You have no joy.  
But with open ears You have made me.  
Burned-offerings, and sin-offerings  
You make no request for.  
Then I said: See, I have come  
As the roll of the book has given orders.  
My joy, oh God, is to do Your design.  
Yes, Your law is in my heart (xl. 6-8).

### (5) *The Love of God*

It is the belief of the song makers that while God has all power and is holy His rule is gentle. One of His chief qualities is Love. The word commonly used of His way of looking upon

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

His people is *chesedh*, kind feeling. It is the quality which more than any other the prophets had a desire to see in the behaviour of their people. In its complete degree *chesedh* is only to be seen in Yahwe. In one of the songs, number cxxxvi., the line comes again and again all through: 'For His *chesedh* keeps on for ever.' Number ciii. may be named The Song of Yahwe's Love.

Yahwe is full of pity and grace,  
Slow to be angry, and with much *chesedh*.  
He will not make protests at all times,  
He will not keep being angry for ever.  
High as the heavens over the earth  
So great is His *chesedh* to His worshippers;  
Far as the east is from the west,  
So far He puts our sins away from us.  
As a father has pity for his children,  
So Yahwe has pity for His worshippers (ciii. 8-18).

This strong belief in God's kind feeling is marked in almost all the prayers of the song-makers. They come near their God with the secrets of their wrong-doing and their requests, and they are certain at all times that He will give an answer. In times of great trouble they may be forced to the thought that God is against them; but even then they are ready to see some error in themselves by which they are for a time cut off from Yahwe. They then have certain hope that by making public their error and true sorrow for what they have done they will get forgiveness through the mercy of God. 'He will not keep His angry feeling for ever.'

### (6) *The Private Religion of the Jews*

The greatest thing in the Psalms is their witness to the private religion of the best people among the Jews. Public worship then and now is one thing and a very good thing; private religion is another. It is good when they go hand in hand.

Here in the song book we have the fruit of Jeremiah's teaching that religion is a thing between a man himself and his God. A man makes his prayer for himself: God gives ear to him. A man does what he is able to keep God's law himself, and God gives him strength to do it. Sin is something which comes in between God and man, and it is for a man himself to keep no

## THE SONGS OF A PEOPLE

secrets from God and to get forgiveness. A man may come to be conscious of having God as his friend, his helper, his Saviour. All this comes out clearly in the songs. God is Rock, Tower, Strength: never far off, but near at all times and ever ready to give help.

Yahwe is my keeper, I am without nothing.  
He gives me rest in green fields,  
He is my guide to quiet waters,  
Making my soul young again.  
He is my guide on straight foot-ways,  
Because of His name.  
Even though I am walking in a dark and narrow place  
I have no fear of evil, because You are with me;  
Your rod and Your club—they are my comfort (xxiii.).

### (7) *The Question of Pain*

The song-makers were troubled by the old question of pain. The teaching of Deuteronomy was that joy and well-being are the reward of being good; but round about them they saw men of wealth who had no belief in God and were evil-doers, while they themselves were sometimes very poor and very ill. They were not able to see the reason for this, but they were conscious that God is a very present help in time of trouble.

Great evils come upon the upright  
But Yahwe is his saviour from them all;  
He keeps all his bones safe,  
Not one of them is broken.

Out of that feeling that God is near and kind, joy came to them even in times of pain and sorrow:

You have put into my heart, oh Yahwe,  
A deeper joy  
Than was theirs who had grain  
And wine more than they had need for.

These song makers were not certain, as Christians are certain, of eternal life on the other side of death: what they had in view was existence in a dark under-land where men are cut off from God. But to some of them hope came that this would not be their end.

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

You will let me see the way which goes to life;  
To the full joy which is before Your face,  
And the pleasures given by Your hand for evermore (xvi. 11)

As for me, I am with You at all times,  
You keep a grip of my right hand,  
By a design of Yours You are my guide  
And later on You will take me to glory.  
Whom have I in Heaven but You?  
And on earth I have desire for nobody other than You.  
Though body and heart may be wasting away,  
God my strength is mine for evermore (lxxiii. 23-26).

### (8) *The Jews and other Nations*

The Jews had come to be fully conscious that God is King and Ruler over all nations, but they had the belief that they were God's special people. He had given them a revelation of Himself such as He had not given to others. Some of the prophets had said it was God's design that knowledge of Himself was to come to all nations through the Jews; men like the writer of the Book of Jonah made attempts to get them to take up the work of teaching other nations, but the Jews gave them no attention. Time went on and they came more and more to keep themselves a separate people, in their pride looking down upon all others as if these were lower than themselves. This was true even though they were under the government of other nations: they kept up a feeling of hate for their rulers. Again and again they put up a fight against them. It was natural to have such feelings for those who were crushing them with hard and cruel rule. The song-makers frequently put their strong feeling into bitter words, crying for God's punishment to come upon their enemies.

Let all who are haters of Zion  
Be put to shame and overcome!  
May they be as the grass on the house-top  
Which is wasted away before it has come to growth! (cxxix. 5, 6)

O daughter of Babylon, you waster of people!  
Happy is he who will give you payment  
For all you have done to us!  
Happy is he who takes your children,  
Crushing them violently against the rocks! (cxxxvii. 8, 9).

The Jews still had far to go in God's school!

## LOOKING BACK

WHAT have we been learning in the second part of this book?

Our attention has been given to a people named Jews who have a very long story, much of it recorded in history. We have taken a look at their story for the purpose of getting an answer to the question: What knowledge of God had they? We have seen a slow development in their belief. They were at all times conscious—as Africans are conscious—of the great Power working in things, on earth and in the sky. At first they were not certain that the Power was One and only One. As the Africans had their *orisha* and *lubare*, so the Jews had their *elim*. In very early times they had only a general name for the Power, but through Moses the revelation came to them that His name was Yahwe. And Yahwe made an Agreement (the Berith) with them by which they became His people and He became their God. As time went on there was a growth in their knowledge of Him. God's special instruments for teaching them were the prophets. They made three things quite clear: (1) God is only one, and all power is in Him; (2) God is the Ruler and Judge of all nations; (3) God is holy and a lover of righteousness—He is pleased only by good acts and not simply by prayers and offerings. The great teachers put into writing laws for guiding the Jews on the right road. The knowledge they had of God was very great but it was not complete.

In reading their story we are at all times conscious that it is pointing to the future. It is a story whose end is unseen. The Jews seem to be a people looking for what is still coming. Their teachers said that One would come to be their Saviour and King. The worship which they gave to God is full of suggestion. The form of it is very strange to us—that part at least which was made up of burning the bodies of animals. The idea, however, is a true one: that is to say, the idea of offering to God things which are of great value to ourselves. What was not clear in this became clear in the future. In all this our thoughts „o back again to what we said about the school. When we see

## BELIEF IN GOD AMONG THE JEWS

small children learning the A B C and the simplest words, we are conscious that this is not the end: the end will come later when they are men and women and able to make out the hardest books. When we see boys and girls with playthings, it is not the end: the end comes when they have become men and women and do important things. The A B C and the playthings are pointers to the future: they are not complete in themselves. So are the things in the story of the Jews which we have been learning. What we have seen is like a house without a roof. The walls are there but the building is not complete. What we have seen is like children in school, going up from one division to another but not getting to the top.

Now we will see how the full revelation came to them and through them to all peoples.

PART III

THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST



## CHAPTER I

### THE COMING OF JESUS

#### (1) *He came as a Man and a Jew*

WHEN by the mercy of God the Lord Jesus came to be the Saviour of men, He came as a man and as a Jew. Possibly He might have come as an African, but He did not; He came as one of the children of Israel. That is to say, He was of one blood with the people who, for more than a thousand years, had been trained in God's school in the way which we have seen in the second part of this book. The revelation He gave was designed for all nations, but it was given first of all to the Jews. He made use of their language; their forms of thought were His. Let us keep this fact in mind. If we are to make clear to ourselves the teaching of the Lord Jesus it is necessary to keep in mind that He was talking to people who had knowledge of the older teaching of the Prophets and of Torah. Like all good teachers He made the present knowledge of His learners the base for His new teaching. His starting-point was the Book which He and they had in common. Their Book was His Book. That His reading of it was wide and deep is quite certain. He made frequent use of it in His teaching. Again and again He put the question: 'What do the writings say?' We ourselves will be unable to get clear ideas of what was in His mind if we do not keep the Old Testament before us. That is the reason why we have come to His teaching by way of the past history of the Jews.

Jesus comes before us as one who is quite certain of God. The question which some people put, 'Is there a God?' would have had no sense for Him. There is no word of His which gives a suggestion that doubt on this point was ever possible to Him. He did not give reasons for a belief in God's existence. He was as certain of God as we are certain that fire gives out heat and that the sunlight is bright. This strong belief was common to Him and His people. That God is the Maker of all things, the

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

Ruler and Judge of all nations, One who is working in all events and giving knowledge of Himself to men in numbers of ways—this was their belief and it was His. So far they were in harmony. But that is not all. Jesus had the same starting-point as His people but He went very much farther. He came with a new word. It is that something new which is of greatest value to us.

### (2) *The Life of Jesus on Earth*

It is not necessary to give here an account of the life of Jesus when He was present in the flesh. All the knowledge we have of it comes from the four Gospels, which are open to all. There we are given the beautiful story of His birth at Bethlehem and of how Joseph and Mary went back with Him to Nazareth. Of the early years we have very little knowledge. St. Luke says: 'The child got taller and became strong and full of wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him.' And again: 'Jesus became wiser and taller and more and more pleasing to God and man.' These statements make it clear that in natural development Jesus was like other boys.

Joseph was not a man of wealth. He was a wood-worker who got his living by making ploughs and yokes and other things for the people of Nazareth. While He was still a boy, it seems, Jesus became a learner of Joseph's trade. Probably death overtook Joseph while Jesus was young and He then made Himself responsible for the support of His mother, brothers and sisters, working like other men so that they might have food and clothing. We may be certain that if the family was poor it was happy with Jesus in the house.

Living in Nazareth was simple. In the Gospels we see numbers of pictures of what it was like. In Jesus' stories we see women making meal by crushing grain between two stones, the heating of the oven for cooking the bread, and the working of the leaver in the paste. We see children coming to the mother for bread; the oven was heated by her and the bread was made long before the children had desire for food: she got things ready because she saw what was needed. They had a desire for fish and eggs in addition, and the good mother gave them all she was able to give. They had need for clothing and the time would come

## THE COMING OF JESUS

for new clothing to be got. The boy came to see that even a mother is not able to go on for ever making old clothing new by putting on new bits of cloth—the new takes away from the old and a worse hole is made. Common events like these Jesus made use of in later years in His teaching about God and His ways with men.

There were other things in the little town, and in the country round about, which He kept in His memory. The children at play; men and women at business in the market; men going out to their fields, putting in the seed, getting in the grain. Nazareth is placed in a basin among the highlands of Galilee. Walking about on the hill-tops Jesus saw mountains and places noted in the history of His people: Gilboa, where Saul and Jonathan came to their end fighting the Philistines; Carmel, where Elijah overcame the priests of Baal; Megiddo where good King Josiah came to his death. He saw some of the great highways running through the mountains and bands of Roman military and other strange people travelling. The high land round Nazareth is very beautiful. Jesus had eyes to see the birds and the flowers. He saw when a bird came to earth with a broken wing. He saw the grass and the flowers cut and put into the oven. The wonder of the growth of things came to His eyes: how the earth put out fruit of itself, first the leaf, then the head, then the full grain. He was full of joy when He took in knowledge of all these things: God's voice came to His heart through them: this was God's house and He was God's child in it.

He saw other things: how hard living is for numbers of people; how much disease and sorrow there is; how cruel and how kind men are. He saw how hard good men may be in the name of God—using God's name to put weights greater than their strength upon people. He saw how crushed by rules His neighbours were: they might not do this, and they might not do that, because, it was said, God would be angry and send punishment upon them if they did. They were not things which were evil in themselves, Jesus saw, but little unimportant things like taking a look at oneself in a looking-glass on the Sabbath day! Did God truly make such rules, or did men make them for Him without knowledge of His true desires? Was God like a person who says all the time: 'Don't do this, Don't do that'—a

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

person to whom some Africans give the name *ushilukanzhizha*? Good people took so much care about food—this and that was *taboo*,<sup>1</sup> and would make them ‘unclean,’ they said. They were not so much troubled, it seemed, about the things which came from inside them—disgusting things, evil thoughts and desires, the taking of goods and life, broken faith between husband and wife, envy, wrong-doing, deceit, angry words, pride, foolish words and acts; all these things coming out of the heart of man, Jesus saw them, and the effects of them, every day: certainly it was they which made men unclean and were unpleasing to God!

Jesus saw how greatly the divisions inside His nation made it feeble and how strong was the feeling of His people against outsiders. There was over-powering hate for the Romans who were the over-lords of the Jews at this time; numbers of men and women were ready to take up arms and undergo pain and death to get the nation free from them. The Romans did things which made the Jews angry. Men were frequently forced to go with the Roman military on a journey. The payment of taxes was specially hated. And there was a low sort of Jews who gave their masters, the Romans, help in getting these taxes out of their people; for these tax-takers the good Jews had a disgust which one is not able to put into words. One of the reasons why Jesus was so hated was that He made friends among them. There were Pharisees who were very narrow; keeping not only the Torah but a mass of rules in addition which were handed down from the past. They made advertisement of their religion in numbers of ways and had a feeling of disgust for all who did not do as they did.

Such was the stage for the great life of Jesus. He had knowledge of all sorts of men. He saw them with clear, all-seeing eyes. He had no fear, but much pity, in pointing out where they went wrong and the way which was right. How frequently did He say in effect: ‘Your ideas are wrong! Go in the other direction; make a change in your thoughts about God!’ He was quite certain that right relations between men would not ever be possible till men had right thoughts and right feelings about God.

<sup>1</sup> *Taboo*. All African languages have words for this idea: in Illa the word is ‘tonda’: in others it is ‘zila,’ ‘yila,’ etc.

## CHAPTER II

# WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT GOD

### (1) *Opening Words*

THE Lord Jesus is the Saviour of men, and He is the greatest of all teachers. For Christians it is very important to make a serious attempt to have a look at things through His eyes and to see God and man, life and death, as He saw them. To do this we have to give attention to His words. Let us first get a general outline of some of the teaching before going into details.

### (2) *Abba, Father*

We have seen that the Jews had more than one name for God. Before our Lord's time they had got into the way of not voicing these names. It seems to us to be like the *ukuhlonipa* of the Zulu and Xosa of South Africa. Women of the Banda group, for example, may not say the name of the Chief Tangana, from whom the tribe has come down, or any name which is like it: in place of *tanga*—‘pumpkin’—they have to say *igabade*. This is done out of fear and deep respect for the old chief. In the same way Jews had such respect and fear for God that they would not take His name upon their lips. In their public reading of the holy writings the readers said Adonay in place of ‘Yahwe.’ They made use of such words as ‘The Holy One,’ ‘The Highest,’ ‘Heaven,’ ‘The Glory,’ ‘The Name,’ ‘The Ever-living,’ ‘The Power.’ The High Priest in the House of God would say: ‘He who makes His Name to be in this place.’ From the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew v. 33-37 we see that in oaths God was not named but ‘Heaven,’ ‘Jerusalem,’ and so on. Because of the respect men had for kings and chiefs in old days they did not say words straight ‘to them’ but ‘before them, before their face.’ So when in our Lord's story the son says to his father, ‘I have done wrong against heaven and in your eyes,’ the sense is ‘against God and you.’ So the use of the old name, Yahwe,

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

so dear to Jews in earlier times, had come to an end among the people.

It is a good thing to let our deep respect be seen in the words we make use of; but the use of these forms had a tendency to put God at a great distance from common life. Jesus, on the other hand, was conscious that God was near, and quite naturally He took God's name upon His lips. Probably when talking to the people He sometimes said 'Heaven' as they did, and sometimes 'the Most High'—'you will be sons of the Most High' (Luke vi. 35). But His special name for God was *Abba*, 'Father,' 'My Father,' 'our Father.' Probably this was the first word He ever said as a child. He said it first of Joseph; then He came to say it of God. The word was so frequently on His lips that the disciples kept it in their memory and when the Gospels were later put into Greek the writers kept the word for us in the Aramaic form which was used by Jesus—*Abba*.

We will make an attempt later to see what the sense of it was in the mind of Jesus Himself.

### (3) *God is Spirit*

In St. John's Gospel we have an account of Jesus going to Sychar, a place in Samaria, and of His talk with a woman there. Jews and Samaritans would not have anything to do with one another. One thing about which there was no agreement between them was the place for worship. Jews had their House of God at Jerusalem; Samaritans had theirs on the mountain Gerizim.

The woman said to Jesus: 'God was worshipped by our fathers on this mountain, but you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the right place for worship.' As if God was limited to one place or the other! And in answer Jesus said: 'The time is coming, and it has come even now, when you will not be worshipping the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem . . . when the true worshippers will give the Father true worship in the spirit: because this is what is looked for by the Father in His worshippers. God is Spirit; and they who give Him worship are to give it truly and in the spirit.'

Because He is Spirit God is not limited to any place; He is completely free from conditions of time and space. It is not possible to keep Him in any house, in any land. He may be

## WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT GOD

worshipped anywhere, at any time, with equal profit to your heart, as long as the worship is true; that is to say, if you give it with a sense of God being present. It is not the place which is important; it is your spirit, your inmost life. The spirit of a man is that part of him where he comes into touch with the eternal order of things—where one is conscious of God. The place of worship, Jesus said, was now to be that inmost place where the Spirit who is God and the spirit who is man come together—not in buildings made with hands. Forms of worship, and places of worship, have their value, but only if God is worshipped in spirit. Because He is Spirit God is not to be seen by the eyes of the body, and is not to be housed.

By this word Jesus puts His stamp of approval upon much of the teaching of the prophets—He would be quite in agreement with them in saying how foolish is any attempt to make an image of God. He equally puts His stamp of approval on much that Africans have said about the Highest Being—most of them, as we have seen, would not say it is possible to make a house for God or make an image of Him. God is Spirit.

And Jesus said, in addition: 'He is the only true God; the only God' (John xvii. 3; v. 44). There is no other, and all worship is to be given to Him (Luke iv. 8).

### (4) *God is Good*

A man came to Jesus and said: 'Good master, what am I to do so that I may have eternal life?' And Jesus said in answer: 'Why do you say I am good? No one is good but One, and that is God' (Mark x. 17, 18). In St. Matthew it is somewhat different: 'Teacher, what good act am I to do to have eternal life?' And Jesus said: 'Why do you put Me a question about what is good? Only One is good' (Matthew xix. 16, 17).

Jesus had no desire to be given a name of honour, such as 'good master,' till a man was conscious of what he was saying. He said in effect: You say that I am good—you put a question about the good. Be clear in your thought what you are saying. *Who* is good? What is *good*? There is only one answer. God is the one good Being. All others may become good; only God is good—completely and eternally good. He is the fountain of everything which is good and true and beautiful.

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

### (5) *God is Love*

It is not the Lord Jesus who said, 'God is Love.' One of His disciples said it, St. John. But even if Jesus never put it into three words this was the substance of His teaching about God. God is Power; God is Spirit—yes, most Jews and possibly most Africans would be in agreement with these sayings. But it did not ever come into their mind to say: God is Love. Only the Lord Jesus was able to make men see that. Only He was able to make that belief possible. It was only when men had seen it in Him that they became conscious of what love is in the sense in which the word was used by John.

The word 'love' may be used in more than one sense. There are different sorts of love. There is the love of man and woman, named by the Greeks *eros*. There is the love of friends: the Greeks said *phileo*—'to be a friend.' There is the love of brothers, *philadelphia*—the love of one Christian for another. But the great Christian word is *agape*. The quality of it is put into very beautiful words by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xiii., 'Love has a great power of waiting, is very kind. Love has no envy, does not put itself forward, gives itself no airs, is never rough in behaviour, is never self-interested, is never made angry, does not keep in mind the evil; love is never glad when others go wrong, love is made glad by the good, is at all times slow to make the wrong public, at all times is ready to have belief in the best in others, full of hope, and goes through with things to the end.' This is true love as it is in man—the love which was seen at its fullest and best in the Lord Jesus. And it is that love which is the heart of God. 'God had such love for all men that He gave up His only Son, so that every one who has belief in Him may have eternal life' (John iii. 16).

### (6) *God is Near and God is Interested*

As we have seen, the general belief of Africans is that the Maker of all things was at first living among men as a friend, but then, for some reason or other, He went away to a great distance and from that time God and men have gone their separate ways. He is the controller of great events but not interested in everything men do. The Jews had come, as we

## WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT GOD

have seen, to put God at such a great distance that go-betweens were necessary. Men had to come to God through the priests. No doubt there were good men and women among the Jews, even as there are among Africans, who were conscious that God is near; but the general belief, it is true to say, was that God is at a great distance. Their idea of God was such that there was no pleasure in having Him near.

No, Jesus said to men and women, your idea of God is all wrong. He is Father; at all times He is near; and if you will only see Him in your hearts as He is you will have joy in feeling Him near. He is interested in everything He has made. Take a look at the birds, Jesus said; they do not make fields, they have no store-houses—your Father in Heaven gives them food. Are you not of much more value than they? And if He gives them food, will He not do much more for you? Birds are of so little value in men's eyes that you get eight of them for a penny in the market. But not one of them comes wounded to the earth without your Father being conscious of its fall. And as for you, the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Give thought to the flowers, Jesus said again. God is interested in their colours. They do not make themselves clothing, but even the great King Solomon, in all his glory, was not clothed as beautifully as a flower. And if God gives such clothing to the flowers, which are here to-day and are gone to-morrow, will He not have as much care for you, and more? Why, then, are men and women troubled in their hearts, never free from care, questioning all the time: What food will we have? What drink is there for us? What are we to do for clothing? Jesus said, Your Father in Heaven is conscious that you have need for all these things. Let His kingdom and His righteousness be your first and chief interest and you will have all these things in addition.

God has knowledge of your hearts, said Jesus—of your hearts and of everything in them, your desires, your troubles, your unsaid prayers. And there is nothing He is unable to do. All things are possible to God who has an interest in you and love for you.

Jesus did not say these surprising things to certain very good men: He said they were true about all God's children, even of those who are least important in men's eyes. For every man,

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

woman and child on His earth God has a love and a care far greater than ever seems possible to us.

Not far off, no, but near. Have you a desire to say to Him what is in your heart? There is no need to come to Him by way of priests and offerings of flesh; go quietly into the little inside room of your house, shutting the door to keep out the noise, and there say all you have to say without any feeling of fear—say it like a child saying things to its mother or father; and your Father who sees in secret will give you your reward—a reward which is not in things you put hands on and see with the eyes of flesh, but peace, the joy of feeling Him near, and strength for living a good life.

### (7) *God is King*

It was not strange news to the Jews when Jesus said to them that God is a King and has a Kingdom. That God is the Ruler of nations was the teaching of the prophets. The belief in earlier times was that Yahwe was the unseen Ruler of the Jews only: He gave them laws; with Him was the decision in all important business and He made His decision public through the sign-readers; He went at the head of the army in their attacks upon other people. Later on, knowledge came to the Jews through the prophets that Yahwe was Ruler and Controller of all things and of all nations—and the Judge of all men. So in one of the songs:

Yahwe is a great God,  
And a great King over all gods;  
In His hand are the deep places of the earth,  
The strength of the mountains is His;  
The sea is His, and He made it;  
And the dry land was formed by His hands.

And again:

Yahwe is ruling; let the earth be glad.

And again:

Yahwe is King for ever and ever.

In the thought of the Jews God was King, Ruler and Judge. And this idea is not strange to Africans, their belief being

## WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT GOD

generally that God has control of rain, thunder and other things, and is Lord of Life and Death.

It was not strange news, then, when Jesus said God is King. The words Kingdom of God, or Rule of God, were frequently upon His lips. We will later have to get an answer to the question: What was the sense of these words in the teaching of Jesus? Here let it be noted that in the mind of Jesus the Father and the King were one and the same. In other words, God's father-quality and God's king-quality are not opposite qualities—they are the same quality looked at from different points of view. Government of all things and of all nations is government by a Father—One who is not simply a Judge who sends punishment upon wrong-doers, but One who is a Friend to men and has a desire to give them the best of everything.

He is Father and He is King. We may not keep one quality in mind and put the other out of mind. By overlooking one quality or the other we go wrong. What sort of a father is he who at all times lets his children have their way? It is right for a father to give his children training and to see that they do what is good. Africans are as conscious of this as other people are. One of their true sayings is: *Namakukwe tafwi kabambala kanina*—‘A fowl’s offspring is not put to death by its mother’s kicks.’ Or again: *Nevhuluma tedyi mwana*—‘Though a lion may make deep angry noises at his children he will not take them for food.’ The authority of a father is something which all Africans are conscious of.

Jesus said that God is King and Father. He is not what is named by some Africans a *shichenchemenwa*, that is to say, a good-humoured being. In the minds of some Africans that is what God is. The love of God is something quite different from good humour. He has authority over men. If it is necessary for the well-being of his child a good father will not keep himself from rewarding wrong-doing with punishment. Let us keep in mind that Jesus who said that God is Father, said in addition: ‘Have fear of Him who is able to send to destruction body and soul in Gehenna.’

## CHAPTER III

### GOD, OUR FATHER (I)

#### (1) *Father and Child*

HERE is a father and here is his child. We have clear knowledge of the relation between them. It may be looked upon in two ways. We may say that the father is a man who is responsible for the existence of his child. We may say that the father is a man who is responsible for the well-being of the child. On the one hand our thought is of the natural connection between father and child; on the other hand our thought is of the inner life—the father has love for his child and takes care of him. It may be a relation of two bodies; it may be a relation of two hearts. In the best of fathers these two relations are one and the same; he who is responsible for his child's birth does for his child what it is right for him to do. But there are unnatural fathers who have no care for their offspring; and on the other hand there are men who have love and care for children of whom they are not the physical fathers. Children are frequently taken good care of in the houses of people who did not give them birth.

When Jesus said that God is Father, what was the sense of His words? The sense is that we all come from God, the Maker of all things, and that, in addition, God has an interest in us, and love and care for us, as a good father has for his children, only in a degree far greater than is possible to any father on earth.

What we have said of the father is true of the son. The son's relation to his father may be only a natural and necessary relation; or it may, in addition, be a relation of the heart, of respect and love. A bad son, we may say, is not a son at all in any true sense, because he no longer has the right respect and love for his father. Father and son are not able to get away from the necessary relation of body; but the relation of heart to heart may be broken by the son. In son-quality the heart is more important than the body.

On this point, as we will see later, the teaching of Jesus is

## GOD, OUR FATHER (I)

quite clear. Running all through it there is the thought that son-quality is of the heart. God is Father, men are His children by natural connection, because their life comes from Him; but the inner relation is broken and they are now to become His children by a change of heart.

In our Lord's story of the two sons (we will come back to it) the waster who went out from his father's house into a far country was no longer a son in the true sense; by his act the relation with his father was broken, and in fact it had been broken while he was still in his father's house. His behaviour there was not in harmony with his position. He was under his father's roof, but in heart he was not in agreement with his father. When he came back he said with shame: 'I am no longer good enough to be named your son—I have no right to the name.' In the eyes of his father he was a son all the time—a bad son, but still a son, and dearly loved. He became a son in the true sense when by his father's mercy and his change of heart the relations between him and his father were put right. There was harmony. Father and son were united in love again.

In the mind of Jesus you become the son of your Father in Heaven when you take your right place as His son. Only if the hearts of Father and son are one is there any true sense in the words of the prayer: *Abba, Father.* So St. John says of the Word become flesh: 'He came to what was His, but His people did not take Him to their hearts. To those who have so taken Him, however, He has given the right of being children of God, that is, to those who have faith in His Name, who have this (new) birth of theirs from God, not from man's blood, not from any impulse of the flesh and of man's design.' He made it possible for them to be at one with God.

Let us keep these facts in mind while we go on farther with our Lord's teaching about God.

### (2) *A Look into the Past*

We have seen that it was not strange news to the Jews when Jesus said that God is King. It was not completely strange to them when He said God is Father, though His way of saying it was new.

Writers of the Old Testament had the idea of God being the

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

Father of the Jews. He was their Maker, as He was the Maker of all peoples. By an act of selection He had taken the nation Israel as His son. So Yahwe put in the mouth of Hosea the words: 'When Israel was a child, I had love for him, and I said, Come, My son, out of Egypt.' God's care for Israel was frequently said to be like a father's care of his child (Deut. i. 31; Isaiah i. 2). And on the part of Israel, God was looking for the behaviour of sons: 'A son gives honour to his father, a servant to his master; if then I am a father, where is My honour? and if I am a master where is My fear?' says the Lord of Armies to you, oh priests, who have no respect for My name' (Malachi i. 6). 'You will say to Me "My father," and will not be stopped from coming after Me' (Jeremiah iii. 19). 'Have we not all one Father? Has not one God made us? Why are we acting falsely every man against his brother, as if the Berith of our fathers was nothing?' (Malachi ii. 10).

The prophets came protesting that as a nation the Jews were not a good son. The thought of the people might be that Yahwe was their Father, but to them the relation was a natural and necessary one; that sons are united to their father by the fact that he is responsible for their being. The sense of the teaching of the prophets was that the relation between father and son goes deeper: it is a relation of the heart. And it came to be said that Yahwe was the Father, not of all the nation, but of those persons in the nation who were His true worshippers:

'Like as a father has pity on his children,  
So Yahwe has pity on His true worshippers' (Ps. ciii. 13).

So when Jesus in His teaching said that God is our Father it was not a completely new thought. But words which are old may be used with a sense which is much wider and deeper than before, so much so that they seem to be completely new. And the sense in which Jesus said 'Father' was quite new. On His lips it was not one of a number of names for the Highest Being. It was the sign of a new experience of God.

### (3) *The Experience of Jesus*

We would be in error if we took the teaching of Jesus to be the outcome of reasoning from natural facts. It was not simply a thought. It came out of His living experience. It was some-

## GOD, OUR FATHER (I)

thing of which He had certain knowledge in his heart. He was conscious of being the Son of God in a special sense.

When He was a boy, Joseph and Mary came upon Him in the Temple at Jerusalem, seated among the Teachers, hearing them and putting questions to them. Mary said to Him: 'Son, why have you been acting to us in this way? Your father and I have been looking for you.' He made answer: 'How is it that you were looking for Me? Do you not see that it is right for Me to be about My Father's business?' Then after His baptism by John He saw a vision and a voice came to Him: 'You are My dearly loved son, in whom I am well pleased.' And from that time on to His death He was completely and unbrokenly conscious of God as His Father. This is not to say that at the baptism He became Son of God: He is the eternal Son of God.

In the story of the vine-garden, Jesus said that the owner went into another country after putting his property into the hands of farmers; then when the fruit was ready he sent servants to get some for himself. The farmers gave the servants blows and put some to death. And at last the owner sent his son, saying: 'They will give respect to my son' (Mark xii. 1-11). The sense of this story is that Jesus puts Himself in a position different from that of the prophets—the servants of the owner; He is the Son, they are only men who were sent by their Lord. From this it is clear that He was conscious of a right to be looked upon as having a special relation to God—the relation of Son to Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane His prayer was: 'Abba, Father . . . all things are possible to you; take this cup away from Me; but in any event let what is your desire, not Mine, be done' (Mark xiv. 36). Here we see Jesus, faced by a death of shame, putting Himself completely in the hands of His Father-God, ready to be and to do whatever may be His desire: if life, then life; if death, then death.

Back of all the teaching of Jesus there is this very strong living experience of God. It is not for us to have full knowledge of everything in that experience; but we are able to see that it was full and deep.

### (4) *The Authority of Jesus*

It was out of that experience that there came the authority of Jesus. His teaching was a surprise to the people because of

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

the authority with which He gave it. The Scribes were Teachers of the Law; their business was to make clear the sense of Torah. They would say: 'There is a teaching which says. . . .' 'It has come to my ears that so-and-so said. . . .' But the word of Jesus was: 'Truly I say to you.' The authority of the prophet came from the belief that he was sent by God: 'This is the word of Yahwe,' he would say. When Jesus made statements, He said: 'I say to you.' It was with authority. It was not something got from other people. He always had a clear vision of what was true and right.

Jesus was conscious of having powers which other teachers did not have. One of His greatest sayings was this: 'All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one has knowledge of the Son but the Father, or of the Father but the Son and he to whom the Son gives the knowledge.' In this great saying, 'knowledge' is not simply knowledge of facts such as one of our teachers is able to give us. It is a thing of the heart, not of the mind. Knowledge of God, in the sense of Jesus, is a feeling of being in harmony with God. When Jesus says He has knowledge of the Father, the sense is that He sees into the heart of God who is Father, that He has love for the Father like the Father's love for Him, and that He has complete faith in God's design for His children. He who has this knowledge of God, this sense of harmony with God, has everything which is of true value; it is the best thing of all and the greatest; everything God is able to give is his.

Jesus, Son of God, has that knowledge and He is able to give it to others. To men who are without Jesus, God seems to be far away and uncertain. Jesus makes them conscious that He is there, near at hand, present at all times, and their Father. Through the Son men may come to have that sense of harmony with God, that feeling of being at one with God, which is the true and only possible knowledge of God. This is the revelation of God which comes to us through Jesus

## CHAPTER IV

### GOD, OUR FATHER (II)

#### (1) *From Man to God*

JESUS had this happy experience of God. And when He made attempts to get people to see what He saw, He said: Take a look into your hearts! Some of you are fathers and mothers—good fathers and good mothers. What is your feeling about your children? What is your behaviour to them? You have joy in them. The thought of them is pulling at the cords of your heart all the time. You take pleasure in their playthings and half-words. You have knowledge of their needs, and so far as you are able you give them things. If there is only a little food in the house, you do not let the children go without. It is your desire that they may have everything which is good for them. And if you who are men and women, and so not completely good, have this knowledge, this pleasure and these desires, how much more will God do good to His children?

Jesus said this to the people of His nation and of His time: He would say it to-day to the Africans, who have great love for their children.

He had no fear of looking into the heart of man at its best and seeing God there. He saw God in everything which is good and beautiful and true. The spirit of God is in man; man's love has some of the qualities of God's love. And when Jesus made attempts at teaching people what God is like He gave them a picture of good men. God is like *that*—He said—and *much more!*

#### (2) *One of Our Lord's Stories*

A certain man, Jesus said, had two sons, and one of them was not happy in his father's house. As to his body, he was there with his father, but as to his heart, he was far off. He

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

had a desire to go to another place, and his father, against his feelings, gave him money to make this possible. He went off, and in a far country got into bad ways. His money was wasted till he had no more. He was forced by need to become the servant of a man who sent him out to take care of his pigs —a disgusting thing for a Jew. One day when in need of food his thoughts were turned to his father. How foolish I am, he said to himself; here I have no food and there in my father's house the servants have more than enough. I will go back to my father and I will say to him: 'I have done wrong against God and you. I am no longer good enough to be named your son; let me be your servant.' He got up and went to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming and was moved with pity; running to him he gave him kisses of joy. Starting to say his thoughts out loud, the son said: 'Father, I have done wrong . . .' but he was stopped by his father, who said to the servants: 'Go and get the best robe and come back with it quickly. Put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Get a fat young ox ready and let us make a feast and be happy, because this my son was dead and is now living again.'

This story makes clear the idea of God's father-quality in the mind of Jesus. If this is what a good man will do to his son who has given him pain and sorrow: how much more God, the great Father! Jesus is conscious that not all God's children have love for their Father; He is conscious that they do wrong and give Him pain. But if they are bad sons they are still sons, and He still has love for them.

There is a second part of the story which has a very important point in it. This man had another son, a good son, who did not go from his father's house. All the time he gave ear to his father's orders; he never did him any wrong. The thought of his well-doing was his pride. When the younger son came back, this son was angry because of the father's forgiveness of the other. He would not say 'my brother'; he said, 'This your son.' He had bitter feelings against him and his father. As a punishment let the waster be made a servant and do the dirty work, but a robe and a ring and a feast! No, no, such things were for a good son like himself; for a waster, let there be only punishment! He would not go in to the feast.

## GOD, OUR FATHER (II)

This is a picture of men who have a twisted idea of the relation between father and son. Their opinion is that a father is first of all a judge, and that if his son does wrong it is necessary to make him undergo punishment. To their mind the father was not right in being pleased to see his son again and making a feast for him. The right thing to do was to send him away again or make him a servant. For a good son, good things; for a bad son, pain and sorrow.

It was not this father's way. His love for his son was strong and deep. He was happy to see him again—happy to see a sign that his son's heart was changed. Possibly there was not much sign of it; possibly he had come back because he had no food, not because he was conscious of having been a bad son and of giving his father pain. But the great thing for the father was that his son was back in the house again. He had faith in the power of his love to overcome his son's heart and make him at last a true son.

It is a picture of God's grace. Jesus said: God is like that!

God's heart is greater than man's little measure of it. Jesus did not say that wrong-doing was unimportant in God's eyes. Far from that. But to His mind God is a great-hearted Father whose love for His children does not come to an end, however far they may go wrong. He does not make a distribution of good things to good men only, and because they are good. Jesus did not say: Be good and God will give you good things because of His love for you. What He said was: Here and now, as you are, good or bad, God is loving you.

This was a new teaching. Most people in our Lord's time, like possibly most people to-day, had the idea that God was angry with all wrong-doers and had nothing in store for them but punishment. They did not take the view that God is able by the power of His love to overcome evil and so be the Saviour of wrong-doers. Jesus came to men who were not able to see how God was at the same time all-holy and all-loving. In their mind most people were without value in God's eyes—that there was love in God's heart for those who were against Him was outside all reason. Jesus said that God is the Father of all, and that all men have it in them to become His sons in the true sense.

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

### (3) *The Father of All*

It is quite certain that Jesus said that God takes care of every person, that He gives His rain and His sunlight to all, if they do His desires or if they do not. His giving is not measured by men's behaviour or even by their power of valuing what He gives: He gives to all with open hands. And it is not only for the mass that He has love, but for every one, great and small.

This is what Jesus said:

'It has come to your ears that at one time it was said: You are to have love for your neighbour and hate for those who are against you; but I say to you: Have love for those who are against you and make prayers for those who give you pain, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven, because He makes His sun come up on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the upright man and the bad. If you have love for those who have love for you, what is your reward? Do not even the takers of taxes the same? And if you say "Good day!" to your brothers only, what do you more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same? You are in this way to take in all with your love, even as your Father in Heaven does' (Matt. v. 43-48).

More than this. God's acts are not only kind; He not only has no desire to take His good things from the men who give no thought to Him: He has a strong desire to get wrong-doers to come back to Him, even as a keeper of sheep is moved to go looking for his wandering sheep.

When some people made protest against Jesus because He took food with bad men, Jesus gave answer in the form of stories.

'Is there a man among you, owner of a hundred sheep, who, if one sheep goes away from the rest, will not let the ninety-nine be by themselves in the waste-land and go after the wandering one till he comes upon it? And when he comes upon it he puts it on his back with great joy. And when he comes to his house with it, he gets his friends and neighbours together and says to them: "Take part in my joy, because I have got back my sheep which was wandering." I say to you that even so there will be joy in Heaven over one wrong-doer whose heart is changed, more than over ninety-nine upright persons who have no need of a change of heart.'

## GOD, OUR FATHER (II)

Even those who seem in the eyes of men not to be important, God takes care of them. Jesus said: 'See that you do not have a low opinion of one of these little ones; because in Heaven their angels see My Father's face at all times. . . . The face of your Father in Heaven is fixed against the loss of one of these little people.'

These sayings of Jesus, and others, make quite clear what His thought was about God. Their sense is that God is the Father of all. His great design is that all the best things are to be for all men. It is for all men, in their turn, to be true sons of God, pleasing Him, living in harmony with Him.

## CHAPTER V

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

#### (1) *Two Views of the Kingdom*

WHEN the Lord Jesus came among men His first public word was: 'The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Let there be a complete change of heart, and put faith in the Good News of God.' He had much to say about that Kingdom.

It was not new teaching in the ears of the Jews. They were looking for a Kingdom of God. But their thought of it was very different from His. In their mind it was a Kingdom here on earth, like other kingdoms, with its chief town Jerusalem, and a great King whose rule would be over all nations. The King was to come from God—he was named Messiah. They were looking for him to be their saviour from their hated overlords, the Romans. This was the common idea of the Kingdom of God. We see it in the request which the mother of James and John, two of our Lord's disciples, made to Jesus: 'Let these my sons have a place, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in your kingdom.' She had a desire that her sons might be our Lord's chief *induna*,<sup>1</sup> controlling the nations under Him. Numbers of people, when Jesus came, saw in Him the hoped-for King. At one time at least they were about to come and take Him by force, to make Him king (John vi. 15). The men who took Him before Pilate, the head of the Roman Government in Jerusalem, said of Jesus: 'We came upon this man attempting to take our nation out of the right way, saying people were not to make payment of taxes to Cæsar, the Roman king, and saying that He Himself is Messiah, a king' (Luke xxiii. 2). In the sense they said it this was a false statement. But in fact it was the desire of numbers of Jews that Jesus would come forward as their king, and get together an army against the hated Romans. If He had put Himself at their

<sup>1</sup> *Induna* is a Zulu word for the men who are acting under the directions of the chief and as his representatives.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

head, possibly most of the people would have been happy to go to war with Him against the nation hated by them all.

But this was not the way of Jesus. He saw quite clearly that His nation was not to be made better and happier by the use of armed force. When Pilate put the question to Him: 'Are you the king of the Jews?' His answer was: 'My kingdom is not a kingdom on earth; if it was, then My servants would make war' (John xviii. 36, 37). War had no place in the purpose of Jesus, Prince of Peace.

In His teaching, Jesus did all He was able to make clear to people what the Kingdom of God is, and to get them to put out of their minds wrong ideas about it. The first words of a number of His stories are: 'The Kingdom of God is like . . .' Let us put together some of the things He said about it.

2

### *(2) A Kingdom of the Heart*

The Kingdom of God is not a unit of geography like Africa or Europe, like Uganda or England. It is not a political organization like the kingdoms we see on earth, with kings and chiefs, controlling bodies, policemen, taxes and prisons. Men and women who are in the Kingdom are not united by a common language like a tribe; or by the same blood like a family; or by a common country like a nation. A person does not come into it by right of birth. Any person may come in if he makes a decision to do so: it is a question of decision, not of birth. The greatest in the Kingdom are not greatest because of goods or money, or because of a quick mind or strength of body. The disciples of Jesus sometimes had discussions about this. 'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?' was their question. And in answer to the question Jesus took a little child and put it into the middle of the group and said: 'If you do not make a change in your hearts and become like children you will never get into the Kingdom at all' (Matt. xviii. 3). Another time Jesus said to them: 'You have knowledge that the rulers of the nations make overmuch use of their power and their great ones have authority over them. Not so with you. Whoever has a desire to be great among you let him be your servant, whoever has a desire to be first among you let him be your slave,<sup>1</sup> even as the

<sup>1</sup> *Slave*: servant who is his master's property.

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

Son of man has not come to have servants but to be a servant and to give His life for the good of others' (Matt. xx. 25-28). It is something like what an old chief of the Ila had a way of saying: *Bwami mbuzhike*—‘a chief is the servant of all.’<sup>1</sup> The quality of being truly great comes from being a servant of society.

The sense of all this is that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of the heart. To be in it is to have certain qualities. The special marks of the people of the Kingdom were pictured by Jesus in His Blessings. People who are without false pride, who are full of a burning desire for righteousness, who have a love of mercy, who are clean-hearted, who are peace-makers—happy are such people, said Jesus, because the Kingdom is theirs (Matt. v. 1-10).

When some people who had the wrong idea of the Kingdom put the question to Jesus: ‘When is the Kingdom of God coming?’ He made answer: ‘The Kingdom of God is not coming as you have hopes of seeing it; no one will say, Here it is, or, There it is; the Kingdom of God is in you’ (Luke xvii. 20, 21). It is a thing of the inner life, of the spirit, of the heart. The effects of it are seen in ways of living, in behaviour, but the Kingdom itself is not to be seen by the eyes of man.

In the prayer which our Lord gave us as an example of prayer, we make the requests: ‘Father, let your kingdom come. Let your desires be done on earth as they are done in heaven’ (Matt. vi. 10). The second of these requests makes the first clear. The Kingdom comes in the degree in which God’s desires are done among men. The Kingdom is formed of all who are living in harmony with God’s design. It is a relation of person to person: between God who is King and Ruler and those men and women who in their hearts take Him to be King and Ruler. The Kingdom of God is the Rule of God in the heart of man.

### (3) *A Thing of Growth*

The Kingdom is here and it is still coming. It does not come all at one time. This is the sense of some of our Lord’s stories.

He said the Kingdom is like seed put into the earth. A man

<sup>1</sup> Word for word in English: ‘Chiefdom is slavedom,’ that is, ‘the position of a chief is the position of a slave.’

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

puts it in, and goes to bed and gets up again; day by day, night by night, the secret life of the seed is at work in the earth—the man has no knowledge of how it is done. ‘The earth goes on producing of itself, first the leaf, then the head, then the full grain’ (Mark iv. 26-28). The process is natural and secret. So is the Kingdom of God. It comes slowly, quietly, with no sound. In a simple form it has been in existence through all time, because in all times some men have had God in their life; in a very special sense it came when Jesus came among men; but in a wider sense it keeps on coming through all the years of man’s history, and it will come fully and completely some time in the future when God’s purpose is worked out.

Its starting-point is in the heart of one man, or in the hearts of a small number. But it goes farther. Jesus said it is like leaven. A woman puts leaven into a paste, made of meal and water, and in a strange way it goes on working and working till a change has taken place all through the paste—it becomes like a sponge (Matt. xiii. 33). Such is the process of the Kingdom of God: it comes into a heart and then its effects are seen in all life, the life of persons and the life of society.

What if its start in one heart seems to be unimportant? The Kingdom is like a seed of mustard—the smallest of small seeds. But see its growth! In time, said Jesus, what comes from that seed is greater than any plant; it becomes a tree, so great in size that the birds come and go to sleep in its branches (Matt. xiii. 31, 32). So in time, the Kingdom will be in the hearts of men of all nations.

Our Lord was conscious that not every seed gives produce. The event is dependent upon a number of conditions and chiefly (if the seed is good) upon the earth into which it is put. One of His stories was about a man who went out with his seed and on the way to the field some seeds were dropped on the road, and the birds took them for food. Other seeds got into earth which was full of stones, and some into earth which had in it the seeds of waste plants; not one of these seeds came to full growth. It was the seed in good fertile earth, He said, which gave much fruit, one seed producing even a hundred (Matt. xiii. 1-9). Our Lord was conscious, in addition, that bad seeds have fruit like good seeds have—in the earth and in

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

the heart. In one of His stories the servants said to their chief: 'Did you not put good seed into your field? Where do these waste plants come from?' And the chief said: 'It is the act of one who is against me. Do nothing to them now, good or bad, till the time comes for getting in the grain, and then they will be put separate' (Matt. xiii. 24-30).

Our Lord saw quite clearly how hard it is for the Kingdom to make headway among men. The things of this earth have great attraction for us. The getting of goods and money takes the place of better things. 'How hard it is,' said Jesus, 'for those who have much money to get into the Kingdom of God! Why, it is not so hard for a camel to get through a needle's eye as it is for a man of money to get into the Kingdom of God!' (Luke xviii. 24, 25). And money is not the only thing which gets in the way. But Jesus had complete faith that in the end the Kingdom will come fully on earth. •

### (4) *The Value of the Kingdom*

In the mind of Jesus the Kingdom has much greater value than any other thing. That is why He said to His disciples: 'Let the Kingdom be your first interest.' The best of other things takes a second place: the Kingdom comes first.

This is the sense of some of our Lord's stories. 'The Kingdom of God,' He said, 'is like a thing of very great value which gets put away in the earth; the man who comes upon it puts it away again, and in his joy makes an exchange of all his property for money and gives it all for the field. Again the Kingdom is like a trader looking out for beautiful jewels; when he comes upon a jewel of high value he puts all his property on the market and gives all the money in exchange for the one jewel' (Matt. xiii. 44, 45).

The sense of these sayings is quite clear. The Kingdom is to be got at whatever price. A man may have to give up other things for it, but having the Kingdom he has everything of true value. Jesus said it is better to go into the Kingdom with but one leg or one arm than to go into Gehenna with an unbroken body. It is because there is complete joy in the Kingdom. The best thing in life is not to get money and other things which come to an end; the best thing is to have a life

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

which is in harmony with God's design, to do His desires, to be God's help in making His Kingdom come in the life of other men. It is impossible for anything to be greater and more important than this. In comparison all other purposes are small. The way of the Kingdom is the way of life.

### (5) *The Kingdom without Limit*

There is no limit to God's Kingdom. It is for all who will take the decision to come in. The greatest of the prophets saw this clearly, but most Jews did not see it; in their mind the Kingdom of their hopes was limited to their nation and to such outsiders as took over the ways of the Jews. But our Lord did not put any such limits. He said: 'People will come from east and west and north and south to their places at the feast of the Kingdom of God' (Luke xiii. 29). Not all Jews would be there, He said; a man is not in the Kingdom because he is a Jew, or because he is white or black. The Kingdom is open to all men, because all men have the power, in their measure, to do what God desires. A Kingdom which is of the heart, and not a unit of geography, has no landmarks. The worst of men may take their place there if they will do what Jesus said: Let there be a complete change of heart and put faith in the Good News of God!

## CHAPTER VI

### LIVING AS SONS OF GOD (I)

#### (1) *Ways and Laws*

THE question was put to an old man in Nyasaland: 'When you say, "A good town," what is the sense of your words?' This was his answer: 'A good town is where the headman and the older people are respected by all, and where they, in their turn, give thought to all, even the children. It is only a good town where the young have respect for their fathers and mothers and all their relations, and where no person makes an attempt to do damage to another. If there is even one person who puts others in a bad light, or does damage to them, then the town is bad.'

It is probable that all wise Africans are in agreement with this old man in Nyasaland. We are not able to say that in this sense all African towns are 'good'; but at least this is the African idea of what is a good town; if they had their desire, all towns would be like that. The idea is of a society in which every person has his place and is responsible to the others for what he does and says. His thought is not to be of himself first: the good of others, the good of society, is to be his chief interest. This is the reason why Africans have customs and laws, what are named by the Xosa *isiqelo* and *isiko*. There are things which may be done and things which may not be done; words which may not be used; and Africans are conscious that even the thoughts of the heart have to be controlled. All this is for the purpose of making the town 'good,' that there may be peace and harmony. If people are to have a life in common, men and women, and even children, may not do anything against everything which is pleasing to themselves; their acts and words and thoughts have to be controlled by respect for the good of others. If a man's self-control is feeble, he gets help from society whose customs and laws give him a pull in the right direction. It is hard for a person to go against them. If they do, and are loose in their behaviour, then society is ready

## LIVING AS SONS OF GOD (I)

with punishment. And it is not to be overlooked that the African society is not formed only of men and women living in the flesh; there are, in addition, others who are still living though unseen—the people who by the foolish are named 'the dead.' Society is formed of all these and all of them have to take thought for the good of all. The fact that Africans are at all times conscious of these others, the unseen, is very important; because these have power and authority, and if their feelings are wounded by old customs and laws being broken they will send punishment. Fear of what they may do, and fear of what other people may do, keeps numbers of men in the narrow road marked out for them by their fathers. Among numbers of Africans there is, as we have seen—in great things if not in small things—a fear of God and of what God will do if certain laws are broken. As a control of behaviour this fear is generally feeble. Are Africans conscious of doing what is unpleasing to God when they say what is false, when their thoughts are unclean, when they take other men's property?

African society, and in fact all society, is least strong at this point. So long as the society is normal and authority is respected, things may go on very well. Any man who has no right feelings for other people, and only has a desire to get his way, is controlled in some degree by fear of what may come to him. When a society is broken up, or when men go away to other places and are no longer under the control of their group, their support is gone, they are without a guide, their sense of being responsible to others is undermined. The great need is for some finer control which is not dependent upon society and its rules. It is not to say that we are able to do without society. No man on earth is able to be free in the sense of living by himself only for himself. Man is so made that society is necessary to his existence. But society is strongest when it not only has its customs and laws but when all men and women in it have in their hearts a burning desire to do what is right—when they are moved, not by fear of what will come to them if they do wrong, but by a true and overpowering love of good. It is true that the dream comes true of 'the good town.' Africans say *mozo ngu sungwe*—'the heart is the guide and moving-force.' And the question of questions for them, as for all peoples, is, how to get the good heart?

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

The same question was ever before the great teachers of the Jews—the prophets. Jeremiah, we saw in an earlier part of the book, had much to say about the new Berith—of the time coming when all men would have knowledge of God, and of His desires, and would do the right thing because their desires and God's desires were the same: they would do right, not because of some law outside themselves but because of the law in their hearts.

### (2) *What Jesus said*

What did Jesus, the greatest of all teachers, say about this?

Most people, when He came, had still not seen farther than the idea of outside law and custom. It is true that the best men and women were conscious of being responsible to God. But their ideas of God were frequently in error. In their mind He was chiefly the great law-giver to be feared, and right living was chiefly a business of keeping rules. All their behaviour was ordered in the smallest points—rules for dressing, rules for food, rules for this day and that. Their thought was less of the heart than of the act and the word. From their viewpoint they were very good men, well-pleasing to God.

The way of Jesus was very different. He did not put an end to law and custom; but He made love for God and love for man the driving-power, the controlling force, of man's life. In effect this was His teaching: Get right with God. Get the right idea of God as your Father and King. Go about things in God's way. Let your thoughts be like God's thoughts. See things as He sees them. Let your life be at all times the life of a child of God. Let your behaviour be such that you will not be shamed by your thought of God. Be full of joy when you go about doing God's desire here on earth which is God's house, conscious all the time that He is near and loving. Not fear but—love is to be your guide.

Jesus did not come to give men a new body of laws in place of old laws. He did not make a new system of rules for the government of everyday behaviour. What He gives is a new outlook on life, a new measure of value, a new line of thought, a new sense of God. It is all based upon His view of God as Father and King.

Let us take a more detailed look at some points.

## CHAPTER VII

### LIVING AS SONS OF GOD (II)

#### (1) *The Law and the Heart*

THE Lord Jesus said: 'Do not have the belief that I came for the destruction of the Law or the prophets; I came not for their destruction but to give full effect to them' (Matt. v. 17). In fact, when the new views which He put forward got a grip upon men's hearts, much of the old way of living was naturally dropped—the new thought was not in agreement with the old. But ~~there was much good in the old ways.~~ Jesus did not come for the destruction of law and order. He came to *timiliza* (as Swahili say) the law—to make it complete, to give full effect to the inmost sense of it. He did it by turning attention away from simply doing things to the spirit in which things are done. Here are some examples of what He said.

'It has come to your ears how it was said to men in old times: Do not put men to death against the law. But I say to you: Whoever is angry with his brother will be judged by God. It has come to your ears how it was said: Do no wrong with a woman who is married to another man. But I say to you: Anyone who even takes a look at a woman with evil desire in his heart has done wrong with her, even now, in his heart. The saying has come to your ears: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you: You are not to put up a fight against wrongs done to you. The saying has come to your ears: Have love for your friends and hate for those who are against you. But I say to you: Have love for those who are against you and say prayers for those who give you trouble . . . so that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven.'

Jesus sees through our acts and words to our inmost heart. We have witness in ourselves that He is right. When the first Christian teacher to the Suto, Mr. Eugene Casalis, was teaching them the Ten Rules of Moses, one chief was able to keep only nine of them in memory. Mr. Casalis said to him: 'Number

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

ten is, You are not to have desire for what is another man's.' 'That is not a separate rule,' was the chief's answer, 'I have said that rule in saying, You are not to take another's property, and, You are not to do wrong with a married woman.' This chief saw clearly that desire is the root of wrong-doing.

The heart is the spring from which thought and word and act come; and only from a good heart are we able to get good behaviour.

The teachers of the Jews made a number of rules in the name of God. Jesus said that these were a great weight on the people; to His mind they were nothing but an attempt to make clean the outside of a cup. 'First make clean the inside,' He said, 'so that the outside may be clean in addition.' At that time, as in Africa to-day, there were great numbers of taboos; this thing and that thing might not be taken as food, for example. The Law said that the taking of them made people unclean. Jesus said: 'Nothing outside a man is able to make him unclean by going into him; it is what comes from him which makes him unclean. From inside, from the heart of man, the designs of evil come: sex evils, taking of other people's property, putting to death, bad desires, cruel and unkind things, deceit, envy, pride—all these evils come from inside and they make a man unclean' (Mark vii. 14-23).

It was in this way that Jesus gave effect to the old Law, making it complete. He went from the act back to the heart. He made clear the inner sense of the Law. Not behaviour only, but the impulse at the back of behaviour comes into His view of things. That is why He said to His disciples: 'If your righteousness is not greater than the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (the teachers of that time) you will never get into the Kingdom' (Matt. v. 20).

### (2) *The Greatest Rule*

A man put the question to Jesus: What is the chief of all the rules of the Law? And Jesus made answer: 'The chief rule is: Give ear, O Israel, Yahwe our God is one; and you are to have love for Yahwe your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your power. The second is this: You are to have love for your neighbour as for yourself. There is no other rule greater than these.'

## LIVING AS SONS OF GOD (II)

Our Lord takes this old rule and puts new life into it by reason of the new sense in which the name of God is used by Him. Men may have fear for a King in Heaven, Lord of all the earth and sky, Maker and Keeper of all things; they are able to have love in a true sense only for a God of whom they have knowledge that He is Father and not simply King and Lord. This law is very different from numbers of other laws. Law says: Do this; Do not do that; and punishment is in store for him who does not keep the law. The Law of Moses made rules for keeping the Sabbath holy. In these days there are laws about the payment of taxes. Punishment is for those who do not do what is ordered. And this is right. Laws are to be respected, and force seems to be the only way to make them respected by people who have not a good heart. But the Law of Love is of a different sort. Men are not to be forced into love. The Ila say, *Kapuka takashinikizhiwa umbwina mbu katazanda* —‘an insect is not to be forced into a hole for which it has no desire’; and nobody is able to make a person have love for God or man against his desire. We come back to the old question: how to get a good heart.

### (3) *Love for God and Man*

Our Lord put love for man together with love for God. One of His disciples, John, made a true picture of his mind when he said: ‘If anyone says, “I have love for God,” and at the same time has hate in his heart for his brother, he makes a false statement; because he who has not love for his brother whom he has seen is not able to have love for the God whom he has not seen. And we get this rule from him that he who has love for God is to have love for his brother in addition’ (I John iv. 20, 21).

What is the sense of the words, ‘Have love for God’? The answer which Jesus would give is: What is it to have love for your father and mother? You are conscious of being dependent upon them for your life and for all you have while you are still a child. You keep a sense of debt to them. You have a respect for their words—you do your best to be pleasing to them. You give them back some part of what they have done for you. All this—and much more. And if God is your Father, then your

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

love for Him is to be of the same quality, and much greater. In loving Him you are loving everything which is good and true. And love for God, says Jesus, is to be with the mind; which is to say, love is to be based upon knowledge of what He is and a true view of His purpose and desire. We are not to be His worshippers blindly; but clear thought and deep true feeling are to be part of our worship and love.

And with that love for God is to go love for man. Because God is our Father and the Father of all men, all men are our brothers. We are all in the one family.

Most Africans are conscious of the relation there is between men of the same clan. They are as the fingers of the hand—united and acting together. They are banded together to give one another help all through life. Every one in the group has a feeling of being responsible for the others. If wrong is done to one of them, the others will give him support; and if one does a crime, the others will not let him down. They are brothers. This *mukoa* (as the clan is named by Ila) is a very good organization, and in part gives a picture of what Jesus would have all men to be. The clan has its limits, and men do not have the same feeling for outsiders as they have for the insiders. The Banashiluwe,<sup>1</sup> for example, are at all times ready to come to the help of one another; but they are not so ready to give help to Banampongo.<sup>2</sup> In the mind of Jesus there are no such limits. Take away the limits and be kind to all men as if they were of your clan and you will come near to the desire of Jesus. May we not say that in His mind all men are of one clan, the Bana-Leza—God's clan?

This is the sense of the great story of the Good Samaritan. A man put the question to Jesus, Who is my neighbour? and in answer Jesus made a word-picture of a man who was attacked on the road to Jericho. Bad men took away his property and went off. He was half-dead from his wounds. A priest came by and, on seeing him, went past on the opposite side. A Levite did the same. But a Samaritan came to where he was, did up his wounds, putting oil and wine into them; put him on his beast, took him to an hotel, and gave him all attention. The morning after, he took out two shillings, gave them to the

<sup>1</sup> Banashiluwe is the name for the men of the leopard clan.

<sup>2</sup> Banampongo is the name of men of the goat clan.

## LIVING AS SONS OF GOD (II)

hotel-keeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and if you are put to further loss I will make payment on my way back.' Now, said Jesus to His questioner, which of these three men, in your opinion, was the neighbour of the wounded man? He said: 'The man who had pity for him.' And Jesus said: 'Then go and do the same.'

The point of the story is that the man who did the kind act was not of the same people as the wounded man—he was a Samaritan, and Jews would have nothing to do with Samaritans. It is like saying they were of different clans; but the Samaritan's act made it clear that his feeling was not limited to the narrow range of his nation or clan. He was a man and the wounded person was a man, a man in need; that was enough for him. And if we keep in mind that all men are our brothers because they are, like ourselves, children of the one Father, how much more ready we will be to come to their help in every way!

### (4) *Forgiveness of Wrong*

But to be kind is not our only debt to other men. In His teaching and in His behaviour Jesus made it clear at all times that He had great respect for men. With Him there was no looking down on them as if they were of a lower order than Himself. If we are true to Him we will not give honour only to men of high position and great wealth; the least man, woman, or child on God's earth will have honour from us because they are equally with us children of the one Father-God.

The special point on which our Lord had much to say is forgiveness of wrong.

When men are kind to us it is natural to be kind to them in turn. When another man does us a wrong we naturally have an angry feeling against him and a desire to do him as much damage as he has done to us. Jesus said: 'As you would have men do to you, so do to them.' And if others do you wrong, let your good feeling for them be unchanged: do not have what is named by Ila *inkoto*, a fixed angry feeling and desire to get the better of them. 'Be full of mercy as your Father is full of mercy,' Jesus said. There is no credit in being kind to those who are kind to you; be like your Father who is kind to the evil and the good.

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

One of our Lord's stories was about a king who made up accounts with his servants. One man was in debt to him for three million pounds. He was unable to make payment of that very great amount, and his master gave orders that he was to be made a slave, with his wife and children, and all his property was to be turned into money in payment of the debt. The servant went down on his face and said, 'Let my hands go free and I will make full payment of all.' And out of pity for him the master made him free of his debt. But when that servant went away he came across another who was in his debt for twenty pounds. He took him by the throat and with cruel words said: 'Make payment!' He went down on his face and said: 'Let my hands go free and I will make payment.' But he said 'No' in a hard voice and had him put into prison till he made payment. This act made the other servants sad, and they took the news to the master. He got very angry and he said to the servant: 'You bad man! You got forgiveness for your great debt. Was it not right for you to have mercy on your brother-servant as I had on you?' And he sent him away for punishment till he made full payment of his debt. And Jesus said: 'My Father will do the same to you if you do not have forgiveness for your brother from the heart.'

In the prayer which He gave to be an example of prayer we make request: 'Our Father . . . give us forgiveness for our wrong-doing as we have given forgiveness to them who have done wrong to us.'

In all things and in all ways, Jesus goes back to God in His thoughts about men—goes back to the fact that God is Father, a holy Father. In His mind, good living is simply being good children of God, doing what is pleasing to Him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GOD UNVEILING HIMSELF

#### (1) *The Word of God*

‘NOBODY has ever seen God at any time, but God has been unveiled by the only Son, who is upon the Father’s breast.’ That is what John, one of our Lord’s disciples, says. The starting-point of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke is with the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem; but St. John goes back to the very start of existence. The Word, through whom all things came into being, became man, he says, and for a time had His living-place among us. ‘We have seen His glory—glory such as an only son has from his father—seen it to be full of grace and truth’ (John i. 1-18).

These words take us into the heart of things.

We are not able to see a man’s thoughts. But when thoughts are put into words and into acts, and so come to our ears and eyes, we get knowledge of them. Jesus is the Word of God and the Act of God.

The eternal God is outside the range of our full knowledge. ‘What wealth without measure there is in the wisdom and knowledge of God!’ says St. Paul. ‘How far past discovery are His decisions! How secret are His ways of doing things! Whoever has been clear about the thoughts of the Lord? All comes from Him, everything is living by Him, everything has its end in Him!’ (Romans xi. 33-36). On all sides we have witness to His power; we are conscious that He is present. But what is He at heart? The answer is in Jesus. He is the eternal Word, the unfolding, the unveiling of God. He is God’s heart saying the deepest thoughts of God in language which is clear to us because it is the language of men.

#### (2) *Teaching and Living*

We have, in this part of the book, been talking about Jesus as a Teacher—the greatest of all teachers. We see in Him the

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

best example of a teacher whose life is the looking-glass of his words. There was never a man whose teaching was like His. Some men say it is not possible to put that teaching into operation in the business of everyday life. But He did put it into operation. Go through the Gospels and make a comparison between what He said and what He did. It is the greatest test of a teacher: is his life parallel with his words? He who said that men are to have love for God and for man—did He have it? He who said that the Kingdom of God is to be man's highest interest—were His thoughts for Himself first and only second for the Kingdom? He who said His disciples are to do to others as they would be done by—did He not give good for evil? He whose rule was forgiveness, did He not make a prayer for forgiveness for the men who put Him to death? Point by point His life was in harmony with His teaching.

And it is that life, that day-by-day behaviour, which is the true unveiling of the heart of God. It is a clear picture for the eyes of men of what the eternal God is in Himself.

### (3) *A Picture of God*

Philip, one of the disciples, said to Jesus: 'Lord, let us see the Father, that is all our desire.' And in answer Jesus said: 'Philip, have I been with you all this time and still you are not clear in your mind about Me? He who has seen Me has seen the Father' (John xiv. 8, 9).

All through the years men have put the question: What is God like? The full answer came with Jesus. God is for ever what Jesus was in the days when this earth was His living-place in the form of man. He is not all of God; the eternal One, Maker of earth and Heaven, was not able to put all of Himself into the little life of man. But there is all we have need of. Our deep desire is for knowledge of God's heart, and that we have in Jesus. In reading the Gospels we see how good He was, how He went about doing good; we have no doubt about His love for God and men. And all over that beautiful life we see the words: This is what God is like!

St. Mark, for example, lets us see part of one day in the Saviour's life. It was a day of rest, the holy day, and He went into the meeting-place (synagogue) for the purpose of teaching

## GOD UNVEILING HIMSELF

the people. There was a man there with an unclean spirit, and Jesus had pity for him and made him well. From the meeting-place they went to the house of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was ill in bed; and He went up to her and took her hand. The disease went out of her at His touch. And at nightfall, when the sun had gone down, people came with all who were ill or troubled by evil spirits, in fact all the town was there, and He gave new life to numbers who were ill. The morning after, He was up long before daylight and went away to a quiet place for prayer to His Father in Heaven. And when we see how kind He was to all in need in that town, how untired He was in doing good, a quiet voice inside us says: Yes, certainly, God is like that! He did not make clear to the reason of men why there is no much evil in the world. He did something better. He put up a long hard fight against the evil. And as we see Him doing it we get the knowledge that the evil is not in harmony with God's desire—He will do anything possible to put an end to it.

We see Jesus again with people for whom others had nothing but disgust or hate—women of the streets, people without friends or houses—and He is the friend of all. We see Him with Martha and Mary, whose brother is dead, and how great a comfort He was to them. And in every act, in every drop of pity falling from His eyes, we see deep into the Father's heart.

There were times when Jesus did not say sweet things, when, in fact, He got very angry. Cold-hearted people, hard-hearted people, false-hearted people, who seemed to be good and were not good—for all such He had hard and bitter words. We are to take all this into the picture of God which we see in Jesus. What is wrong is even more wrong when we see it through the eyes of Jesus—there are things which do not seem wrong till we see them through His eyes. When we become fully conscious that God is the Father, then we see sin to be what it truly is—it is a wounding of the Father's love, and there is no other wrong so bad as that.

### (4) *The Death of Jesus*

The death of Jesus, no less than His life, is an unveiling of the heart of God. It was a death of shame. Only men who did the very worst crimes were put to death by being nailed to a

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

cross of wood. The account of it in the Gospels gives a shock to the reader: we were not conscious that it is possible for men to be so cruel, so full of hate. He who was the kindest and best of men, who had never done wrong to anyone, but had given all His time and strength to the helping of others—that *He* was forced to go with a cross upon His back through the streets, be whipped and made sport of, and then have nails hammered through hands and feet and have the pain of hanging on the Cross in public: this, certainly, is the worst thing men ever did, the act which most of all is the shame of man. Jesus might have kept Himself from this pain and shame; but with full knowledge that He would be put to death He went on His way, still doing good.

Do we ever put the question to ourselves: Where was God that day? Were His eyes shut when this thing was being done? Was it nothing to Him that His Son was put to this shame? Why did He not put a stop to it? It is hard to make this clear to our reason. It is part of the wider question: Why is there so much pain and evil on earth? We have some light on this question.

In the girl's school at Mbereshi, in Northern Rhodesia, one of the head girls—*bakalamba*—went wrong and had to be shut out of the school. Miss Shaw, the head of the school, was very sad when she gave the news to the other *bakalamba* of how the girl had said: 'Let me go away before my equals have knowledge of my shame, they will have a feeling of hate for me for damaging their good name.' There was bitter weeping among the girls, and they went to bed without a word. The day after, Miss Shaw saw that not one of them was taking her food, and when she put the question, Why? the answer was: 'Our friend has to be shut out. We are conscious that it is not possible for her to go on living here with us, but our desire is to have a part in her punishment. She is one of us and we have all things in common with her—what is ours is hers, what is hers is ours, the good and the bad. We are taking our part in her shame.' So they went without food for a time and gave up other pleasures. By their help the girl who had gone wrong got back the respect of the people and the forgiveness of her relations.

Such a story as this takes us a long way into the secret of the death of Jesus.

## GOD UNVEILING HIMSELF

We are conscious that much of the evil on earth comes from man's wrong-doing. It puts man against man. And Africans are right in their belief that God and man are parted through man's sin; not because this has taken God away from us, but because it makes His face clouded to our eyes. By becoming a man Jesus made Himself one with us. He took upon Himself the weight of evil which is upon us, all the pain and shame of it. The shame of the men who put Him to death was the true cross which was upon His back and in His heart. And that shame is ~~our~~ shame—the common shame of all men. So much as this it is not hard to make clear to our minds. But there is even more in it. In Jesus we see God Himself taking upon Himself the pain and shame of man's sin. From the Cross comes a ray of light upon the darkest of our questions. In the great fight against evil on earth and in our hearts God is not at a distance and out of touch. He is in it with us. And the Cross lets us see how far God is ready to go, and does go, for the salvation of men. He goes as far as love will go—to the very limit. 'God was in Christ getting men to come back to Him in place of measuring their sin' (2 Cor. v. 19).

### (5) *How to get a Good Heart*

Jesus makes it clear that love is the strongest force on earth. When we see Him we get the knowledge of what true love for God and man is. When it is said to us: 'You are to have love for God with all your heart and for your neighbour as yourselves,' it may be that the words have but little sense for us. Who and what is God that we may have love for Him? Fear, respect, worship—yes; but love? Is it ever possible for love to be ordered? It comes or it does not come—you are not able to make it come. To have love for such a God as is pictured by numbers of people is not possible at all. But to have a true burning love for the Lord Jesus is very possible. Millions of people have it to-day. Not because they are ordered to have it; but simply because they are unable not to have it—His attraction for them is so strong. There are people who say that they have love for Jesus, but fear, or even hate, for God. But Jesus and God are not to be kept separate in this way. All Christian teaching is based on the idea that Jesus and God are one at heart; in Himself

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

God is what Jesus is. Jesus, we are certain, is the highest good we have knowledge of. To be fired with love for Him is to be in love with everything which is true and beautiful. Love for Jesus and love for God is one and the same love.

Here is the answer to the all-important question so frequently put: How to get a new heart in man? Laws and rules are not able to give it. Behaviour may be controlled by them. For people who have no desire to be good, who have no impulse inside them to do good, laws and rules are necessary. The only impulse comes from love. And God has His way of giving that impulse. Jesus is that way. When we see God unveiled in a person of such attraction as Jesus, we are overcome. Worship of a God like that is natural, we are not able to keep from it. It is a worship which is the outcome of love, not of fear; a true worship. For men who are full of love for Him, all things become possible. Their hearts are made new. They will do for Him what they would never have done without Him. To go in the way pleasing to God is to go in the way put before us in the life and death of Jesus.

### *(6) Death had no Power over Him*

There is one other thing to be said; and that is the most important of all.

The Christian religion is based upon a belief, a certain knowledge, that the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross was not the end. He is still living. He is a present Saviour.

In an earlier part of this book a short account was given of two women who came to Kasenga some years ago to make peace between two chiefs who had been at war. The story which they gave to the writer of this book was a very strange one. It had come to their ears, they said, that he had been preaching to the people about the Son of God: their desire was to get fuller knowledge of Him. That Mwana Leza, the Son of God, came down to earth was not a completely new story to them. It had been handed down to them by their fathers: how in the past Mwana Leza came down to earth and went about from place to place doing good and how in the end people put him to death. But, they said, though he seemed to die, he went on living unseen by men, and his spirit comes into

## GOD UNVEILING HIMSELF

certain people whom he sends to do the work which he did on earth, preaching peace among men. That is why these two women were at Kasenga at that time: their belief was that the spirit of Mwana Leza was in them. The writer has no knowledge where the women got this story from. They had come from a distance where there were no Christian teachers. Wherever it came from, there was much which is true in their story.

Readers of the Bible get knowledge of the events which took place after the death of Jesus on the Cross. Joseph of Arimathea ~~went~~ to Pilate and made request for the body of Jesus. Pilate let him have it. Joseph got a linen cloth and, taking Jesus down from the Cross, he put the linen cloth round Him and put Him in a hole which had been cut out of a rock; and a stone was rolled against the door of the hole. In this way Joseph did for Jesus what was done for others whose life on earth was ended. ~~That~~ was on a Friday. Then on the first day of the week three women came with spices to put on the body. They saw that the stone was rolled back. They went into the hole in the rock and saw a young man dressed in a white robe. They were full of wonder. He said to them: 'Do not be troubled; you are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who has been put to death on the Cross; He has got up from the dead; He is not here; see the place where they put Him! But go, say to His disciples and to Peter, He goes before you into Galilee, and there you will see Him, as He said to you' (Mark xvi. 1-8).

Yes, Jesus had said to them again and again that He would be put to death and would come back from the dead; but they had no belief in this strange saying. Now they had certain knowledge that it was true. All their doubts were taken away. They saw Him with their eyes; His voice came again to their ears. They were conscious that He was with them. Writing to the Christians at Corinth some years later, St. Paul said that ~~the~~ Lord Jesus was seen by Peter, then by the twelve disciples, then by over five hundred at one time, the greater part of whom were still living; then He was seen by James, and last of all by Paul himself.

Our religion is based on that fact. The fact that He was Son of God was placed out of all doubt when it was seen that death had no power over Him.

The story of the life of Jesus while He was here on earth is

## THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

very beautiful. It has great attraction for our minds and hearts. The reading of the story makes us happy. If only we had been living then, we may say, what joy His smile would have given us! It would not have been hard to be good while He was present with us: we would have taken of His strength and become strong. Is not that our feeling at all times when we are with men of power? Our love for Him would have been so great that we would have done anything for Him—would have gone to death for Him if there was need. Well, the best part of the story of the Lord Jesus is not that He was living on the earth over two thousand years back, and that He was full of pity and mercy for the people of His time. The best part of the story is that the Lord Jesus is living to-day and that His power comes into us if our hearts are open to take it in by faith. Ours is not a dead Saviour, but a living Saviour. What He says about God is true. He is the Way to God: through loving Him and working for Him we come to true and certain knowledge of God.

## THE END

WHEN a teacher first came preaching the Gospel to one African tribe an old woman said: 'There now! I was certain in my heart that there is a God like that!' The story of Jesus seemed to her to be the answer to all her questions about the Power, which she, and all of us, are conscious of.

We have come a long way in this book and now our journey is ended. We have seen what light the Africans had before the News came to them—how far their knowledge went. They were certain of God's existence but not of the qualities of His heart. Their mind was full of questions to which they had no certain answer. We have seen, in addition, what light came to the Jews, specially through the great prophets; it was true light, but not full. And now at the end we have seen how the full light came so that all men may get, as St. Paul says, 'the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ.' To Him be the praise and the honour for ever and ever!

